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My Young Wife.

BY MY YOUNG WIFE'S HUSBAND.

CHAPTER I. MY WIFE AND I.

My young wife!
I sigh as I write those words.
Why?
Should they not call up pictures of happiness?
They should, but they do not.
I am fifty-two; my hair is streaked with grey; the crows have left the marks of their feet in the corners of my eyes, and I am sedate and reserved.
Perhaps that will explain why I sigh when I write those words, "my young wife."

I sigh, yet a thrill passes over me as I think of her, and know that she is mine.

Have I been a fool?

I ask myself that question forty times a day.

Was I a fool to dream of happiness at my time of life—to think that a girl, young, artless, unskilled in the world's harsh discipline, could assimilate with a world-weary man like myself?

I remember her as she was when I wooed her in her country home—a gay, laughing sprite—a sunbeam in the household—the delight of her parents' hearts.

I think of her as she is now—variable, petulant, now unnaturally gay, now moody—never at rest.

Is she not happy?

What a foolish question to ask!

How can she be happy when bound to one so unlike herself? And yet we agreed well enough during our short courtship.

How she used to make my heart beat high with joy when we walked out of an evening, and she clung to my arm, and looked so lovingly up into my face!

It is not strange that I dreamed of happiness, but marriage has effectually dispelled it.

Whose fault is it, I wonder—hers, or mine?

Ah! I suppose we are both to blame.

Perhaps I should be more patient with her; she is as a child in comparison with me.

Ah, me! It is useless to speculate—to conjecture; the fact remains; she is my wife, my young wife—and we don't agree.

I think I *was* a fool to marry her. But I couldn't give her up now—no, never! How miserable I should be without her!

I shudder as I look back upon my lonely years of bachelorhood; I could not endure them again.

How will it end?

We seem to be drifting further and further apart each day. We have been married only six months, and it has come to be cause for sighs and reflections already.

Was ever a man so troubled as I am?

First and foremost, my wife—my dear, little, bright-eyed Ettie; then that ward of mine, so high-strung and self-willed; then those two boys—men, I suppose they are, but they seem to me like boys, as their father was my equal in years. Dear old friend! what a pity he should die so suddenly, and leave those sons of his without one restraining influence, save an uncle away off in India.

How will it end, I— Ah! there's Ettie now, out on the veranda.

I am sitting in my library; my desk is placed between the two windows that open upon the veranda, so I can see her plainly.

What a beauty she is. She is standing in the full light of the October after-

noon sun; it shines upon her uncovered head, and lights up her hair of reddish-brown, that waves and curls so bewitchingly, clustering about her high, white forehead, and about her ivory neck.

What a face she has; pale, to be sure, but so lovely; and her eyes—well, they are the loveliest hazel eyes that ever woman owned. Her form is perfect, round and full, and exquisitely moulded. All in all, she is a beauty—a fascinating woman.

She displays remarkable taste in dress. That surprised me at first, for in her country home her attire was the plainest. Just see that dress of dark-blue silk—could anything be more becoming? How it sweeps about her, adding to her height and stateliness and how it brings out her white complexion by contrast.

Ah, yes, silks and jewels sit very well on Ettie, my little rustic love—alas, rustic no longer! Contact with society has changed her very—very quickly.

What! She raises her hand to her head in a tired sort of a way. I wonder, if anything ails her? Why do I not go to her and ask? Why is it that I cannot overcome this feeling of restraint that has sprung up between us of late?

She looks sad, and I pity her; I do more—I love her; I long to take her to my arms as I used to do; but in



THE YOUNG WIFE.



THE HUSBAND.

stead, I sit here like a statue, and look at her. She is leaning her head against the column. Oh, something is troubling her! I will go to her—yes, I will! I haven't gone. All I did was to rise and view myself in the glass; I saw my tall, straight, slim form, my grave face, rather stern, piercing grey eyes, mustache and hair all streaked with silver; it made me think of the disparity in our ages, and how rightly she could call me "Old Sober-sides," and say that I made myself ridiculous when I tried to be loving and tender. So I seated myself again, and here I am writing, and then looking at her as she leans against the column.

She starts! Why? She looks around quickly—almost guiltily, it seems to me; she looks toward my window, and I see that there is a blush upon her face; she turns away, and then starts off.

What can this mean? Is there something that she desires to conceal from me? She certainly looked in this direction as if she wished to ascertain if I had seen her. * * * (I resume my writing, and now I will relate what followed that hasty departure of my young wife.)

As she left the veranda, I arose and went to the window; it is in the side of the house, but being a bay-window, it commands a view of the front and back as well. I looked out upon the street, and I saw Oliver Waldon going by. Handsome fellow he is! What a pity he is so wild—so fast, in fact, as they say. And by-the-way, they say more; I have heard that he looks with eyes of love upon my Ettie. Can that be why she started? Was it because she feared I would see him? Did she go out upon the veranda because she knew he was going by?

Heavens! if I thought that was so, I'd—oh, I don't know what I'd do! It makes my blood boil to think of it! Yes, I must love her, for the bare idea of another's receiving her smiles maddens me! Let Oliver Waldon take care! To be sure, he is a more fitting companion for her than I; but then I'm her husband, and have a right to all her smiles, all her love. If he alienates us, I'll have a deeper dislike for him than I have now because of his dissipation; son of my old friend as he is, I could not forgive him such an injury.

Hark! I hear a footfall. Ah, I know well that light, springy step. And, too, the rustle of her silken draperies is a familiar sound.

Beatrice, my ward, rarely wears silk at home, though she is an heiress, and my wife was a penniless rustic. The footsteps approach. She is near the door. Now see how I am congealing, just as if I feared that she would see how I love her. But I have a wholesome dread of her mocking laugh, and her taunting title of "Old Sober-sides," and the only way to avert that is to assume an air of frigidity.

Her hand is on the door, and I am as stern, as austere, as a king about to give audience to the humblest of his subjects.

(Again I resume my writing after the interview.)

She entered, a vision of rare loveliness. There was no blush upon her cheek, no look of guilty consciousness in her glorious hazel eyes; she was calm and self-possessed, as usual.

"Good afternoon, Allan," she said.

"Good afternoon, my dear," I replied, rising and bowing with all ceremony.

She sighed wearily; then exclaiming, petulantly:

"Don't call me that!" she walked over to the window, and looked out upon the street.

How I admired her as she stood there!

Not a word was spoken for full five minutes; she ignored me entirely. It irritated me; I stepped about impatiently, caught another glimpse of my grave face, stern eyes, and grey hair, and I called myself a fool. I had bound her to me, and she was chafing at it, and trying to break the bonds already! "Fool—fool," I kept saying to myself, till my anger became so great that I should have abused myself aloud, had I not taken refuge in speaking to Ettie.

Referring to her last remark, I said—and spite of my endeavors, my tone was fraught with irony:

"Why not, my dear?"

"Because you say it so mockingly. It jars upon my ears to hear it. You don't mean it—then why do you say it? I'd rather be called 'Virago'—'Rustic'—anything detrimental by you; then I'd know you were not mocking me."

"I do mean it, my dear," I said, in a conciliatory tone.

"You do not."

"But I do."

"I say you do not. And for Heaven's sake, Allan Ingram, don't begin contradicting already. I've been in your presence scarcely five minutes, and you are trying your best to begin a quarrel."

"I, Ettie? Trying to quarrel? How absurd! It isn't I, at all."

"It is I, I suppose," she cried, in a rage.

"Well, yes, it is; you must allow that, my dear. I'm sure I am the best judge of the sincerity with which I call you pet names; and it was you who contradicted that—now wasn't it?"

"I simply refused to believe your false assertion. If I was once a country girl, I can tell the difference between sincerity and insincerity."

"Now, my dear Ettie," and I went to her, determined upon a reconciliation, "don't use such harsh words. You do not hate me altogether, I am sure; can't you bear a little with me?"

She looked at me quickly, queerly. I know that I saw tears in her eyes, and a slight quivering of her lips. Then I made an unfortunate speech, and the chance for reconciliation was gone. I said:

"Now, if you'd only try to control your temper, and not fly off at a tangent upon the least provocation—or, as you generally do, without any provocation at all—we would get along so much better than we do."

She burst out angrily then:

"Why didn't you tell me before you married me

that you wanted your wife to be an automaton—to sit like a statue, speak only when spoken to, to eat, dress, sleep by rule? Why didn't you tell me that? and I would have taken laudanum, opium, anything, rather than have accepted you, and then I would have been spared this—"

"This misery," I supplied, as she hesitated.

"Yes, this misery," but her tones sounded forced and unnatural. "I am miserable—wretched—unhappy. It's nothing but quarrel—quarrel—quarrel, till I have come to dread to be with you. I deserve this, I suppose; it is my punishment for marrying a man old enough to be my father, because—because—"

"Because he was rich," I sneered.

"Anything you please," she returned, wearily. "If I should contradict that, you would not believe me. It doesn't make any difference what you think of me."

"Of course not."

I know my smile just then would have aggravated a saint.

"Oh—oh!" she cried out, passionately. "This is unbearable. If you'd only get angry, Allan, it would be better. There you stand, and smile, and agree with all I say—"

"You wouldn't have me contradict, would you? You found fault with me for that only a few moments since. If you say so I'll contradict everything you say; I'll oblige you in any way possible, my dear."

"Oh! was ever a woman so tortured as I?" she cried. She looked really grand as she started from the window, and began to pace the room, her face flushed, her eyes flashing, her hands clasped before her.

"You will not understand me, Allan, or, you cannot understand me. It was all a mistake; it was more than foolish to think that we could live in peace together—"

"That is just what I was saying to myself before you came in, Ettie. I am old, as you say, and it cannot be expected that I should bend to the whims of one who has had no experience in the world—"

"And I am young," she interrupted, "and it can not be expected that I should deport myself with the gravity of a fossil like you."

"Thank you," I said, bowing.

"Perfectly welcome, I assure you;" and she bowed, too.

"There is no use trying to agree, Allan," she added. "I give up the contest now. We will have to endure this life as best we can; when it comes to be beyond endurance, you can send me to my parents or adrift on the world—anything; I'm sure I don't care what."

"Now, don't talk nonsense, Ettie."

"It isn't nonsense. I mean every word of it."

"No you don't, Ettie. Now confess that you are speaking in an angry mood—"

"I won't confess anything of the kind, because it is not so," she snapped, turning on me fiercely. "Why—why will you contradict me always?"

"You just now found fault with me for agreeing with you, my love."

"My love"—what mockery!" she cried, in a ringing, scornful tone. Then she added:

"I'll say no more; you will not understand me. I came here to-day with an object in view. Your mania for disagreeing with me—"

"I beg your pardon, my love. You certainly mean your mania for disagreeing with me."

"No; I do not!"

"I'm sure I'm most willing to be on good terms," I said, persuasively.

"And I'm sure that I am, only—"

"Only what?"

"Only you will not have it so."

"I? Why, Ettie, how can you say that? It is you who will not have it so."

"How you misjudge me, Allan; and you seem to take delight in doing it, too."

"Not at all, my loved one. I should be most happy to believe that you were willing to declare peace—"

"Oh, what a wretch I am!" she interrupted, fiercely. "A shrew, a virago! Well, so let it be."

It sounded to me as if she were trying to choke back her tears, but the defiant look on her face kept me from expressing the tenderness in my heart.

"Let me state my object in seeking you," she said, "and then I'll go. I came to speak to you of Oliver Waldon—"

The fiend of jealousy shot into my heart at her words. How dared she come to me with his name on her lips? It maddened me, and, furious with passion, I cried:

"Spare yourself the trouble, madam. I will not hear a word of him! He has entered my house for the last time. In future he shall be denied admittance. I will not hear one word, especially from you."

"From me? Why do you say that?"

She asked it wonderingly.

"Was she a hypocrite? Was she acting?"

"Tell me why?" she asked again.

"I have my reasons," I said, meaningly.

"What are they?"

"I do not choose to give them now."

"And why not?"

"I wish to wait."

"You speak in riddles, Allan."

"But you can solve them, Ettie," I retorted.

She did not reply. She looked at me for a moment, half anxiously, half scornfully; then she turned and walked proudly to the door.

There she faced me, saying, coldly:

"You are in a strange mood to-day, Allan Ingram. I realize how useless it would be to say anything to you. I wish to do something to alleviate the misery of others, hoping thus to forget my own unhappiness; it was my intention to try to gain your co-operation, but now I will not trouble you. I will work alone, and do what I can. Good afternoon, sir," and bowing grandly, she opened the door, and left the room.

And I stood gazing after her in a stupefied way, realizing that I had widened the breach between us immeasurably.

CHAPTER II.

CLOUDS APPEAR.

We met again at table. I entered the room with a light, cheerful remark trembling on my lips; it was stayed there as I saw my wife's sulky face, and the condemnatory expression upon my ward's.

The meal passed off in silence. I made one endeavor to break it; I said to my ward, pleasantly:

"What a perfect day this has been, Beatrice!"

"Do you think so?" she asked, looking at me rather coldly, with her large blue eyes.

"Yes; there has not been a cloud in the sky—"

"Except the domestic sky," she interrupted.

Discomfited, I retreated beneath my shell, and spoke no more.

I kept my eyes fixed steadily upon my plate, feeling both humiliated and angry that Ettie should have made any one a confidant of our disagreements.

As I arose, I looked at her—I glared, I know, though it was more from pain than anger, but of course, she could not know that, and she met my glance most defiantly.

In passing through the hall I met the porter, and I said to him, loud enough for Ettie to hear:

"I am going out, Peter; if any one calls for me say that I will not be home till late."

I longed to look back to see if my words had had any effect on her; but pride kept me from it.

I took my hat, and opening the front door, I stepped out upon the wide veranda that surrounded my large and stately suburban home.

I stood there for a moment, absently looking up at the starry sky; then I descended to the garden, and strolled aimlessly about.

I had no desire to go anywhere, and after a short time I returned to the house, entering by the back porch.

I met no one on my way to the library. Feeling too dispirited to remand my order to Peter, I threw my hat upon the desk, and sank into a chair before the glowing grate fire that alone lighted the room.

I had scarcely settled myself when I heard:

"You must not misjudge me, too, Beatrice. I have enough to endure from Allan. Let me feel that I have one friend in the house, at least."

It was my wife's voice; it came from the evening room, that was directly in front of my library. It was such a relief to hear other tones than petulant, defiant ones from her, that I concluded to indulge in the luxury of listening.

"I wish I could tell you all," she went on. "I do not refrain for want of faith in you, believe me, Beatrice; but because it would be hurtful to another's interests—to one who is very dear to me, whose welfare I would guard with my life."

Hal! I sat bolt upright, and I am sure my eyes were half out of their sockets. What was this?

"One who is very dear to me, whose welfare I would guard with my life."

Who could it be? Oliver Waldon? Oh, if I only knew, I would start out this very moment and find him, and give him his choice of leaving the country or fighting me!

I leaned forward, waiting eagerly to hear more. Beatrice spoke this time.

"We cannot help being influenced by what we see and hear, Ettie. I have all faith in you; but in Oliver I cannot put my trust. I hear so much, now this, now that—"

"From Marian Stewart, I'll wager."

"Yes, from her."

"Don't believe a word of what you hear, Beatrice; if you do you'll be miserable all your life long."

"But Marian has no object in talking against him; she would not say anything of him if it were not so."

"Listen to me, Beatrice—I know, I have had good opportunity of learning, just what a man Oliver Waldon is. When I call him a man, I consider that I pay him the highest possible compliment."

Ah, hal! it was he, then. My fingers worked nervously from my longing to have them about his throat. Only my desire to hear more kept me from rushing from the room.

"You are alone in your opinion of him, I fear," said Beatrice.

"How severe you are!" exclaimed Ettie, impatiently. "You judge him from report—just as Allan does. I tell you, you do not know him; he is noble, generous, and very—very tender. Oh, how could I live were it not for him?"

At that I started to my feet, fairly trembling with ire. Oh, to hear such words from the lips of my wife! A half-dozen desperate purposes flashed through my mind, and I was about to rush from the room to put one, or all of them into execution, when her voice stayed me.

"He has saved me, and one who, as I have said, is very dear to me, from misery. Don't look coldly on him, Beatrice, some day you will know all as I do, and then you will rejoice that you believed in him now. If my husband loved me all this would not be. I cannot be entirely alone; since he has turned against me I must seek friendship elsewhere."

I was not quite so sure that it was Oliver Waldon now. I sank back into my chair, asking myself:

"Who is it?"

Some one she loved before she married me for my money, probably.

Hush! what is Beatrice saying?

"I will help you all I can, Ettie. If guardy has forbidden him the house there are ways and means of seeing him elsewhere."

"Ah, hal! so she was joining in a conspiracy against me. That settles her fate. She must marry, and go

to a home of her own; she would stir up mutiny here, and there would soon be a tempest in the household. I must have Ettie all to myself if I would regain her love.

"Yes, Beatrice must marry Leonard Waldon—a man so unlike his brother, that while I detest the one I admire the other. It is coyness, I suppose, that causes her to parry the subject every time I broach it, but now it must be settled."

I arose, with the intention to send for her, and have an interview at once. Just then I heard the door-bell, and a moment after a visitor was announced; it was Leonard Waldon, my ward's suitor, and brother to the man I suspected and detested.

Forgetting that I was supposed to be out, I went at once to the evening room. I entered, smiling blandly, and was considerably taken aback at being received by my wife with a start, and a faint cry of dismay, and by my ward with a cold look of astonishment.

"You, Allan?" gasped Ettie.

"I believe so," I returned, sardonically, feeling that I understood her confusion. "Am I not right, Leonard?"

"I think you are," he replied.

"I hope I am," I said. "When one's wife is in doubt, as Ettie just now appeared to be, it rather disturbs one's faith in one's own identity."

"We thought you were out," said Beatrice, in a tone that plainly indicated that I had no business to be in.

"Yes, I know you did." I had my revenge by fairly chuckling that reply.

"How did you know?" asked Ettie, hotly.

"My dear," I answered, meaningly; "I have been sitting in the library for some time."

I saw my wife bite her lips then, and turn aside. Leonard's presence saved me a bitter retort. I seated myself beside him, and endeavored to divert his attention from this unpleasantness.

He was a handsome man, Leonard Waldon. In physique, he was very dark; eyes, hair, complexion, all dark; in nature, he was quiet and meditative. He said very little, but that little was always to the point. So unlike his brother he was—his handsome, dashing scamp of a brother! I considered him a splendid *parti* for Beatrice, and I had for years been determined that she should marry him.

Beatrice was a regal creature—and I may add a strange creature. Though of the purest blonde type—her hair amber, her eyes blue, her skin lily-white—she had not the disposition generally accredited to blondes—gay, light, frivolous; she was as serious, as strong of will as ever brunette was. Her hair was rarely beautiful, and the faultless precision of its arrangement could serve as an indication of her character—not a curl, not a wave, but the smooth, silky braids forming a coronet high up on her head. My wife had used the proper word—severe; Beatrice was severe, though only twenty, an heiress, and with never a thing to trouble her.

I saw Leonard looking at her.

"Do not despair," I said to him. "I shall use all my arguments in your favor, and they must prevail."

"I hope they will, I love her so."

"I know of no man more worthy of her than you, and I shall exercise my right as her guardian and insist on her acceptance of you. She is coy, not indifferent."

A look from Leonard caused me to glance toward Beatrice. I caught her eye, and I felt that she had overheard me. There was a slight flush on her cheek—whether of confusion or anger, I could not determine.

"It's too bad about Oliver, is it not?" he said, as if desirous to change the subject.

That name roused all my interest at once. I forgot that Ettie and Beatrice were in the room. I spoke eagerly:

"What now?"

"Haven't you heard?"

"No. Some new escapade, I suppose."

"Yes. It's only a rumor as yet; but I had it from an authentic source."

"Have you seen Miss Stewart lately?" broke in my wife, looking up from her embroidery. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Waldon, I have interrupted you."

"Not at all—not at all, Miss Stewart, yes; I called on her this evening on my way here."

I saw Ettie's eyes flash triumphantly, and I'm sure I heard her say to Beatrice:

"I thought as much—Marian Stewart is his 'authentic source.'"

"Only a rumor, you say," I said, to bring him back to the subject.

"Yes."

"Well, what is it now?"

"This time his predilection for gambling has —"

A start, and a cry from the other end of the room interrupted him.

Looking up, I saw my wife standing by her chair, pale, trembling, directing a most piteous glance at Leonard.

"What—what did you say?" she gasped.

"I was speaking of Oliver. Of course, I don't hesitate to tell of it here, knowing you all so well; then, too, I wish you to hear it from me, so that you may hear the truth, and not a tale augmented by the retailers of gossip."

"Well—well, what is it?" Ettie asked, impatiently.

I sat, quivering with rage.

Why should she show such agitation as this?

I glared at her, but she did not notice my presence in the least.

Leonard replied:

"He has sustained heavy losses at the gaming-table—there is some shade of dishonor attached to it. Others are implicated, I hear; and unless the matter is speedily settled by the payment of a large sum, there'll be a case for the courts. It became known

through some parties who were present at the time. They are trying to hush it up, hoping to settle it."

Ettie sank into her chair, with a long-drawn, tremulous sigh.

She was still very much agitated.

Beatrice sat as stern and severe as any Roman matron—she was not one to have sympathy with vice.

Ettie looked toward me at last.

She seemed to comprehend how ill-timed was her interest in Oliver, for a flush spread over her face, and she said, confusedly:

"I should be so sorry to hear that Oliver had met with any disgrace."

"If a man does that which incurs disgrace, does he not deserve to have it come upon him?" I asked.

"No," she retorted, hotly; "not always. There may be circumstances that you do not understand —"

"But that you do!" I interrupted.

She looked at me for a moment in alarm; then she said, scornfully:

"I am likely to know—am I not? Am I a frequent-er of gambling halls?"

"Not that—but are you not a partisan of frequent-ers of gambling halls?"

The alarm deepened on her face.

My wrath increased till I could not control myself. I arose, saying, sternly:

"I do not wish to hear Oliver Waldon's name mentioned in my presence; and I shall consider that my wife and my ward sully their lips if they mention it between themselves. I say this right before his brother, who knows the man as I do. He is no saint, enduring martyrdom for another's sake —"

My wife started there, as if she would speak.

I waited for her, but as she remained silent, I continued:

"If disgrace has attached itself to his name, be sure that he has merited it."

"How fortunate are you who are so strong that you can steer clear of all temptation!" said Ettie, rising and smiling. "Of course, with strength you cannot have charity, nor pity for the weak and erring. You admire the strong, but crush the weak! Immaculate beings, I bid you good-night!"

Her smile did not take the sting from her words.

She swept proudly from the room, and an uncomfortable silence fell upon the trio she left behind.

I was glad when at last I was alone.

I went to my library, and there paced back and forth.

Why was I so unhappy? What had happened?

Nothing definite.

I had allowed myself to harbor suspicion and jealousy—on what grounds?

I meditated for half an hour, and came to the conclusion that I was imposing needless torture upon myself.

I determined to go at once to Ettie, and to bring about a complete reconciliation.

"It is my fault that we disagree," I said. "I will lay aside my dignity, and be as I was during our courtship. Dear little Ettie!—how she has changed."

That thought made me sad. Sighing wearily, I went to the window, and looked out. It was a glorious night. The grounds were bathed in the silver radiance of the stars and the moon.

Longing for a breath of fresh air, I opened the window, and stepped out. The October wind came to me bearing with it whisperings of the desolation that was slowly, silently approaching, then it came to me bearing with it the sound of a human voice—and that voice was my wife's.

I peered about, but could not see her; but her words, borne on the night-wind, came distinctly to my ears:

"He can be just, but not merciful. He suspects something now, I believe. I can endure that, but I could not endure that he should know the truth. I will guard the secret with my life, if need be. And you shall not suffer, dear—remember that. Oh, how I trembled to-night, fearing to hear that *all* was known!"

Then I heard some muttering in a masculine voice. I was overcome with horror; I could not move. I stood there like one in a dream, till Ettie's voice again fell on my ear:

"You must go now. It was not prudent for you to come here—but it will not happen again."

Then that muttering, and then she cried, in passionate tones:

"Oh, that I could go with you! This life is breaking my heart. Oh! how I long for the old days—how I long to go back to them! But, since I cannot, I would that I could start out in a new line of life."

I still stood spell-bound, overcome with horror, racked with pain. My Ettie—my Ettie! was she so anxious to be freed from me? Oh, the misery of those moments!

"Till to-morrow night, good-by."

Those words broke the stillness. Then I heard the rustle of a silken robe, and presently my wife's form came in view.

She walked slowly, with bowed head and clasped hands, toward the back porch.

I looked after her till she disappeared from my sight; then I turned angrily, fiercely, in the direction of the retreating tread that I could hear distinctly.

I peered out between the trees, and by the light of the moon I saw my enemy.

He was standing in the walk. I could see his tall, cloaked form, and the hat drawn over his eyes.

As I looked, he removed his hat, and raised his hand to his brow with a gesture of agony.

I caught a glimpse of his face—it was pale, and very sad.

Was it Oliver Waldon?

He turned and walked on, and I leaped over the veranda, and hastened after him.

I was determined to learn who my enemy was, and to—it was impossible to think what the result of the meeting would be.

CHAPTER III.

THE TEMPEST BEGINS.

MORNING. I was seated in the breakfast-room, glancing over the columns of the newspaper.

I was in a peaceable frame of mind. The occurrences of the previous evening seemed to me now like some hideous nightmare. I had resolved to forget them, if possible—at least, I would ignore them; and I would meet my wife as if nothing had happened.

I sat, longing for her coming, hoping to have a few moments alone with her before the breakfast-bell rang.

The door opened gently. I turned eagerly, gladly; but it was not Ettie—it was Beatrice.

That disappointed me sorely. I acknowledged her greeting, and then I took up my paper, sighing wearily, and wondering why everything went wrong with me.

It suddenly occurred to me that this was a good opportunity for speaking to my ward about her marriage.

I looked up. Beatrice was standing by the mantel in a thoughtful attitude, her head resting on her hand. She seemed more severe than ever this morning; perhaps it was because of her black robe, and the jet bands on her amber hair, that formed so striking a contrast.

"Meditating?" I said, interrogatively.

"Yes."

"Upon a pleasant subject, I hope, Beatrice?"

"Do my looks indicate that, guardy?"

"Not exactly; but then you never appear very gay."

"No; for I am not happy."

"Not happy, Beatrice? I am sorry."

"No, I am not happy. I feel dissatisfied, undecided—"

Just the chance I wanted. I interrupted:

"With all your strong points, Beatrice, you lack the happy faculty of being able to make up your mind; it is that that keeps you in this restless, dissatisfied state. Now, I'm older than you, am I not?"

"Considerably," she replied, tartly.

I coughed. I have been sensitive on that point ever since Ettie became mine. I ignored her little thrust, and went on:

"And I have authority over you, have I not?"

"In a measure."

"How?"

That sounded like defiance from her.

"In a measure, guardy. I will obey you so long as you are reasonable; but when you are not, then I shall feel justified in disobeying you."

"Liable to kick," I muttered to myself. "Not at all tractable. Very self-willed and high-strung—very!"

"Yes," I said, aloud. "It seems to me, Beatrice, that a mistake was made; you certainly ought to have been guardian, and I the ward—"

"I feel positive that such an arrangement would have insured a happier state of things," she interrupted.

I felt as if I were a boy then, as she looked at me, and laughed at my discomfiture.

Realizing that it was useless to try to lead up to the subject, I determined to broach it at once.

"Beatrice, I want to see you settled in life."

"Are you going to die?" she asked, in a tone of mock alarm.

"I hope not," I returned, testily. "Cease jesting, Beatrice, and listen to me. It is my wish to see you settled in life—"

"With a slight variation, you have expressed that sentiment already, guardy."

I uttered an impatient exclamation. Then, in the way I knew so well, she knelt down beside me, placed her hand on my shoulder, and asked to be forgiven for her impudence.

"You love your guardian, Beatrice?" I said, gently.

"Of course I do; you have been very kind and good to me."

"And you would try to please me?"

"Yes—in anything reasonable."

"Well, as I was saying, I desire to see you settled in life."

"Variation No. 2. Oh, guardy, is that all you have to say?" and she laughed merrily.

Irritated, I plunged boldly into the subject.

"Beatrice, Leonard Waldon has again asked for your hand; it is my desire—my intention, to see you his wife."

She raised her head quickly, defiantly.

"Well, Beatrice?"

"I do not love him."

"Pshaw!"

"Of course, you have no faith in that sentiment."

"And experience will spoil your faith, too, Beatrice."

Why did I say that? Ettie would hear of it, of course, and it would confirm her idea that I did not love her.

"What is your answer, Beatrice?"

"I will not become his wife!"

"For no other reason than the one you just gave me?"

"I have no better reason now, guardy; perhaps in time, I can give one that even you will consider good."

I looked at her sharply. Was there some hidden meaning to her words?

"I will never consent to your marriage with any one else, Beatrice. He is to come for his answer to-night, and —"

"Tell him, 'no,' guardy."

"Now, Beatrice, consider."

The door opened, my wife entered, and I stopped. How all my amicable intentions had been frustrated! This interview with Beatrice had dispelled my peace of mind. I met Ettie's cold greeting with equal coldness; and breakfast passed over, and still we were estranged.

An hour's moody reverie in my library, and then I arose, feeling that I could not endure this longer.

I opened my door, and there in the hall stood Ettie and Beatrice, talking earnestly together.

Ettie was in street attire—that roused my wrath. So she was going out without one word to me! Her indifference stung me to the quick.

I heard the words:

"You will never regret this step, I know, Beatrice. It was a noble resolve; I admire you for it, and I act as your emissary with great pleasure. Adieu, for a while. We'll outwit the old —"

She saw me then, and she stopped short. And how she changed! She had been smiling, and talking in her old gay way; now she turned pale, and look first sad, then angry.

"You are pursuing your lately-adopted vocation, I see," she said, her lip curling. "I hope the acoustic properties of the hall are such that you have been able to hear all."

"I thank you for the imputation, Mrs. Ingram," I replied. "Could I request you to step this way for a moment?"

"You can, sir." But she did not move.

"Will you kindly come, madame?" I asked, after a pause.

"Certainly. I was waiting for you to make the request."

I retreated into the library. She entered, her watch in her hand.

I looked at it in surprise.

A merry, mischievous look was in her eyes, as she said:

"One moment, you said. I would not wish to trespass on your valuable time longer."

"My company is so disagreeable, I suppose," I retorted.

"Not at all; you are very—very agreeable."

"Don't sneer, Ettie; it is not becoming."

"Ditto. If you sneered less, you would be a deal more good-looking. The moment is up. I am in a hurry."

"Where are you going, Ettie?"

"Sir!"

"I have the right to know."

"I acknowledge that right, but I do not choose to pander to inquisitiveness. I will not tell you."

"You have some motive for that," I cried.

"Have I?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"You would not like to hear me tell."

"I don't like your insinuations, Allan Ingram," she cried, "and I will not listen to them! You are determined to make me unhappy as it is possible for me to be."

Her voice faltered, and my rage vanished. I stepped to her, and took her hands in mine, saying softly:

"Oh, Ettie—Ettie! how will this end? What can I say to you to make you understand just how I feel? Be true to me. Be—"

"I do not need your admonition," she interrupted, flinging my hands off. "I am not a child that I do not know what is due you. Look to yourself, sir; cultivate a little graciousness, and you will be happier."

"Oh, Ettie," my heart was so full I could not say more.

She looked at me in surprise. My face evidently told of my yearning, for she stepped to me, in her charming, impulsive way, and placed her delicately gloved hand upon my arm, and raised her lips to mine.

I kissed her, God knows how fervently; and as I held her in close embrace, she whispered:

"When I return shall we 'make up,' as the children say?"

"With all my heart, love."

"You won't quarrel with me any more, Allan?"

Even with her in my arms, it stirred my wrath to hear that.

"I don't quarrel, my darling."

"Oh, you do, Allan—you know you do. I can't quarrel all by myself—can I?"

"No; but then you always begin—"

"I don't! Who is beginning now, I'd like to know?" and she jerked herself from my embrace.

"Who—who?"

"You need not stop to think; it is you, as it always is."

"Why, Ettie!"

"Oh, you are so provoking, Allan! You know it is you, and yet you stand there and contradict."

"But you shouldn't say that I quarrel, Ettie; you know it makes me angry."

"If you will be so peevish and foolish as to get angry without reason."

"There—there, my dear, be careful. Now, are you not trying to begin another quarrel?"

"If no, it's you. I have said nothing; but you are finding fault—"

"How can I find fault if you have said nothing, my dear?"

"Oh, dear—oh, dear, you are so aggravating! For just one minute you were like yourself, and now you are as stubborn and disagreeable as you can be. Oh, I wish I were back in my country home!"

"I wish you were, my love."

"You do?" Her face was very white, her eyes dilated wide.

"Since you wish it, I do also, for your sake, my dear."

My heart sank like lead as I said that.

"Very well." Oh, how strange was her voice; she had turned aside so that I could not see her face. "I will remember what you have said. I must go now. Good-by."

She left me then. I could have groaned aloud; one moment she had been in my arms and the next we were at odds again. Strange—strange that we could not agree.

What a wretched day that was. Ettie did not return till the dinner hour. When I saw her face, so pale, so sad, my heart fairly ached. I longed for the meal to be over that I might try to comfort her.

It was over, at length, and I went to the evening-room, expecting that she would repair there as usual. I waited for some time, and then I began to wonder why she did not come, and also why Beatrice did not come. I waited for full an hour, and still neither had come.

I was about to send for them, when the door-bell rang, and Leonard Waldon was admitted. His answer—poor fellow, he had come for that, and I had only an unfavorable one to give him.

He entered; he saw my face, read no encouragement there, and his own became overcast. I tried to be cheerful.

"Good-evening, Leonard, my boy; be seated. I was just about sending for the ladies—"

"The ladies,"—and I fancied he spoke sullenly—"you cannot send for them, for one, at least, is out. I met your wife at the entrance-gate as I came in."

"What?" I cried.

"Yes, I met her. She seemed a little startled and hastily drew a veil over her face."

"Are you sure it was Ettie?"

"Positive, sir; I saw her as distinctly as I see you now."

Just then the last words I had heard on the previous night flashed into my mind: "Till to-morrow night, good-by." How significant they seemed now.

I started up quickly, wildly, forgetting everything but the fears in my heart.

"Which way did she go?" I asked, breathlessly.

Leonard pointed in the direction of the road that extended along on the left of my estate.

Without a word I rushed from the room. Hatless, I gained the street, and ran like one mad down to the road. I reached it; pausing and peering till my eyes became accustomed to the dim light there, I saw first a carriage, then the tall, cloaked form of a man helping a veiled woman to enter. My wife? yes, it was she. Was that my enemy who— But I will say nothing of last night's evening; or, was it Oliver Waldon?

While I stood there the horses started on; then I awoke from my partial stupor. I, too, started on, calling out wildly, but to no avail; I ran till I was thoroughly exhausted, and the vehicle was out of my sight. Breathless and faint I leaned against a railing.

"Oh, Ettie—Ettie," I cried, in my agony, "have you left me? Shall I never see you again?"

I battled long with my misery, and then I wearily made my way home. Home! what a mockery to say that now. It was no longer home if Ettie were not there.

Oh, what a wretched walk that was! Every step was like a knife-thrust, as it drew me nearer to my desolated abode. And I was powerless to effect a remedy; I could not proclaim my wife's—no, not falsity; I could not believe her false, but I felt that she had freed herself by flying from me.

I reached the house. A deep groan burst from my lips as I thought how changed all would be within. No Ettie to gladden my heart now—oh, to quarrel with her were bliss compared with this!

A sadder man never lived than I was as I entered the house, and slowly ascended to her rooms.

"She may have left some word," I thought.

I reached her rooms, a suite of three; the foremost one was her sitting-room. I went to that, and paused, hesitating to enter from dread of what I might find there—confirmation of my fears.

At length, I opened the door, slowly, reverently, as if it had been the entrance to her tomb. I saw that the gas was burning low; and then—I stood spell-bound, my hand on the half open door, as I saw, seated in the chair before the fire—my young wife!

CHAPTER IV.

THE TEMPEST RAGES.

I stood, powerless to speak or move, and gazed upon my wife. She had turned languidly around in her chair, and she was looking at me with equal astonishment.

The tableau lasted for several minutes, then my wife said, interrogatively:

"Well?"

And I said, exclaimingly:

"Well!"

After those bursts of eloquence another period of silence followed, during which we still gazed steadily at each other.

The next interruption was a long, loud peal of laughter from Ettie, that aroused me—and my indignation, too. Think of the agony I had been enduring, and then to have the cause of it laugh like this, as if she knew, or had divined, how many heart pangs and groans I had wasted, and was making merry over it. Astonishment vanished, anger took its place, and I stalked into the room.

"Well?" said Ettie again, a little anxiously this time.

"Well!" I exclaimed. It seemed impossible to get further than that.

"I shall laugh again if you don't say something more, Allan."

"This is no laughing matter, madame," I said, sternly.

ly. "Have the goodness to desist. Now explain what all this means."

"All this?" all what?" she asked.

Was that innocence, or duplicity?

"All that has transpired of late," I thundered.

"I fail to understand you exactly, Allan." She spoke nervously. "If you want me to make a full and free confession of everything that has occurred to me, you must give me time—the court always allows even the meanest culprit that. This is so sudden: I hear a slight noise behind me—I turn, and see you standing in the doorway, too astonished to move—then, that changes to anger. Tell me—why astonished? and why angry?"

"Why? because I felt convinced that you were not here."

"And you grew angry because I was here. I wish I had not returned at all." She bit her lips, as if she realized that she had spoken unguardedly.

"So you have been out this evening?" I cried, hotly.

"I have," defiantly.

"You met Leonard Waldon at the entrance?"

"I did," still more defiantly.

"And then?"

"Why need I tell that which you evidently know? You followed me, I suppose?"

"I did, madame."

"You were sadly disappointed, I fear."

"I was."

"And so was I."

What did she mean by that? As I remembered that it could not have been Ettie whom I had seen, I understood her words; she was disappointed because she had not seen "my enemy," for had not I met him, and—but I will say no more of him.

"I understand you, Ettie," I said, sternly. "He was not there. Do you know why?"

She looked at me most piteously; her lips paled, and moved convulsively.

"I'll tell you why," I said, triumphantly. "He was not there, because I had an interview with him last night after—"

A cry came from her that pierced me to the heart—it was so sharp, and shrill, and full of pain.

"Did he—," she began; then she suddenly checked herself, and remained silent, as if she had decided not to compromise herself by saying a word.

"Then it was not you whom I saw enter the carriage down in the lane," I said.

"Carriage!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, a carriage. I followed what I thought was you, saw the person enter a carriage with a—a—yes, a man! I ran after the vehicle, gave up the chase finally in despair, returned, and found you here. I felt so convinced that it was you—"

She started up like a rocket from her chair, indignation expressed on every feature. In tremulous, passionate tones, she cried:

"And did you, for one moment, believe that that was I?"

"I did." Oh, unfortunate admission!

"I thank you for your very flattering opinion, sir. Some day you will learn how you have mistaken me; till then, in order to preserve my self-respect, I shall endeavor to keep apart from one who takes delight in heaping insults upon me—and that one is—my husband!"

"Ettie," I began, pleading.

"Not a word, sir!" she interrupted, proudly. "I shall never forget this—never! And I shall never forgive you—never!"

"Oh, Ettie, be reasonable—"

"No, sir! If being reasonable means listening to you, then I shall be unreasonable all my life long."

I would not plead more. I looked at her as she stood before me, trembling and flushed with her wrath, her lovely hazel eyes fired with passion; her negligence of black, faced with pale blue, her perfect neck disclosed to great advantage; her hair, slightly disordered, fell upon it, and brought out its marble whiteness by contrast.

"How beautiful she is! Mine, and yet not mine."

The thought brought such agony with it that I could have groaned aloud. But my dignity must be preserved. Fool that I was to consider my dignity. I stood there, suffering with hidden pain, outwardly as calm as a summer sea.

A sudden suspicion darted into my mind.

"Where's Beatrice?" I asked, abruptly.

Ettie started, and her hands grasped each other convulsively. She stole a look at the ornate clock on the mantel, ere she answered, falteringly:

"In her room, I suppose."

"I will send for her," and I turned to leave the room.

"No—no!" Ettie cried, in alarm; then as I looked back in surprise, she added, with forced calmness: "I will go for her. Let me go, Allan."

"As you please," I said, smiling grimly at her agitation, feeling sure that my suspicion was correct; that it was Beatrice who had entered the carriage.

Ettie returned almost immediately, and with a triumphant air, ushered in my ward. My smile faded, and I felt, to say the least, uncomfortable.

"You wished to see me, guardy?" Beatrice asked.

"Yes, that is—or rather, I don't know—I mean, I—I—"

I saw smiles on both faces, and I added, angrily: "I believe I did, but I do not now."

I could not humiliate her by subjecting her to such childish catechising as: "Have you been out?"

Had I considered that before I had spoken to my wife, it would have been well.

Wearied and heartsick from these misunderstandings, I turned away abruptly, and descended to my library. On the way I learned from Peter that Leonard Waldon had departed immediately after my unceremonious exit; that Ettie had entered the house about five minutes after, and that Beatrice had not been seen to go out at all. Fool—fool, that I had

been! Such was the burden of my reflections as I paced my library floor.

Could I have seen me, walking back and forth, or bowed upon my desk, she would have known that not hate, but jealous love, was in my heart for her.

In the grey October dawn I stood before the glass and looked at my face, so haggard from this night's vigil.

I started, as I also saw the reflection of the window, the grounds beyond, and a dark-robed figure moving through them.

All my ungenerous suspicions returned like a flash. There was some secret in the house, I felt; this might be an opportunity for discovering it. Without a moment's hesitation, I opened the window, leaped over the veranda, and hastened on toward that moving figure; it was Ettie—I knew her form and step so well.

I have mentioned my house as a suburban residence; it is situated in the suburbs of Boston, occupying a charming site on the Charles river. The back faces the water, and the lawn there slopes down to the water's edge. At the left of the grounds is that lane of which mention has been made; on the right there is no boundary, so to speak—that is, the neighboring house stands a goodly distance off, and a stretch of ground intervenes, well covered with trees.

In that direction Ettie was going. She had a cloak thrown over her head and shoulders—surely no preparation was indicated there—and she walked aimlessly along; even I could not think that she had any definite purpose in view. Yet I followed her stealthily.

She stepped in among the pines and hemlocks, and made her way to the river. The trees extended to the very edge. Against a sturdy pine she leaned, and looked sadly out over the water. She had pushed her cloak back, and I could see her face, pale and sad, and her eyes swollen as if with weeping.

I stood apart, waiting for the rest. Why had she come here? Was it caprice—a desire for solitude—or, was this part of the secret that—

My cogitations were interrupted by a low, terrified shriek from Ettie. What had happened? Why was she leaning over and looking down into the water so intently? Why was her face so white and set, her eyes so wide and wild?

Another shriek, and then she fell on her knees on the damp, dank earth, and commenced pulling—pulling at something. What was it? I peered forward eagerly, and I made out a dark object in the water just within her reach.

A feeling of horror, an instinct of what was coming, kept me rooted to the spot. I stood stock still, staring at her delicate hands as they tugged and tugged at it. At last I saw what I had expected—the face of one dead—then I saw more than I had expected—the dead was "my enemy!"

I fairly quaked as I made that discovery. Suppose it were known that he was my enemy, and that I had met him on the previous night? Oh, horror! what new misfortune was about to overtake me?

I forgot my own fears, however, as I looked at Ettie. She was sitting there like a figure cut from marble, her wild, wide-open eyes fixed upon that face that she had succeeded in lifting up from the water. In alarm I was about to start forward and go to her, when her head drooped, and a deep, heart-rending moan burst from her lips; then followed a low, piteous wail:

"My brother—oh, my brother!"

My God, her brother! I recoiled as if a hand had struck me. I now, for the first time, remembered the existence of such a being as her brother; I had heard him mentioned during my courtship as Herbert, the sailor lad, but I had not thought of him since. Oh, how unjust I had been, and how ungenerous.

She had lost her hold on the ghastly dead, and when I looked again it was out of sight. She remained on the ground bowed with her grief, and moaning at intervals:

"My brother—oh, my brother!"

Suddenly she started to her feet. What a change had come over her. Not pale now, but flushed; not the calmness of despair, but the fury of passion.

"Dead!" she cried; "my brother, for whom I have risked so much! Who has done this?—and why? The law shall find that out. I—"

Why did she stop and tremble so? Why did she bury her face in her hands, and groan aloud? I soon learned, for she raised her face, so full of pain, and wailed:

"Oh, why did Allan tell me that he had met him!"

Why should this terrible suspicion come to me? Oh, no—no, he could not have done this!—and yet, did he not say that he knew I would not meet Herbert? Oh, now the law must not know," she added, wildly. "No one must know for it may reflect on him. Where is it?" as she peered down into the water. "Gone, thank God! It had become fastened here and I have released it, and now the current will bear it far—far away. Thank God for that! Oh, my husband—my husband!" she wailed, as she turned away. "Would to God I had not lived to see this day!"

How heartily I echoed her words. That she should suspect me was agony; and even should I stoutly deny the deed would not suspicion still lurk in her mind?

"Is it right or wrong?" I heard her moan, as she drew her cloak about her with a shivering gesture, and moved away from the river. "It was a struggle between my duty to my brother, dead, and my husband, living. I will spare my husband. Oh, God, give me strength to bear this blow!"

She believed me guilty; I think I hated my wife just then. If it had been to save my life and hers I would not have uttered a word of denial.

"I will never deny it—never!" I cried, in my heart. "She may believe me guilty always, unless chance proves me innocent!"

I allowed her to pass on, and I stood and watched her.

CHAPTER V.

A CONFUSION OF IDENTITIES.

My wife and I met at breakfast, and the usual calm, ceremonious demeanor was preserved between us. I looked at her and wondered—could this be the woman I had seen down by the river? There was not a trace left of the anguish I had witnessed; I could not realize that it had been an actual occurrence—it seemed more as if it had been some hideous phantasy. I did really decide that I had been the victim of a nightmare, as Ettie said:

Allan, do you intend to lend your presence to Marian Stewart's *bal masque*?"

Could she think of festivities if she had seen her brother dead that morning?

"I don't know, my love," I replied.

"You are very definite. Thank you, for nothing."

"Welcome, my dear—welcome. Why did you ask?"

"I thought I would like to know, so that—"

"In case I were going, you could send in your regrets," I interrupted.

"Now, you want me to dispute with you; but I shall not do it. Could you not allow me to complete my own sentence?"

"I thought I would save you the trouble, my dear—"

"You mean, you saw a chance for saying something spiteful, and you were determined to improve it."

"As you please, my love. Now you want me to dispute with you; but I shall not do it."

She arose, in her passionate, angry way, saying, hotly:

"I have asked you a simple question; since you will not answer it, I shall find out what I wish to know. It will be good practice for me, for I intend to do a little detective business, shortly."

That made me think that the morning's occurrence had not been a phantasy.

So I was to be placed under surveillance!—pleasant, that, truly.

I said nothing, for I knew that one word would lead to another, and I was determined not to speak in my own defence.

The *bal masque* was to take place on the coming Friday night. It was now Wednesday. I learned from Beatrice that Ettie was going, and she evidently learned from the same source that I was going.

I was quite taken aback on that evening, when Peter came to my door and said that the ladies desired me to wait upon them in the sitting-room.

I finished the arrangement of my lace necktie, took a survey of myself in my elaborate court costume of crimson satin and white velvet, and then descended.

Two masked figures, like statues, stood before me, as I opened the door. One—tall, grand, majestic—in the long, full skirt of flowered silk, the jeweled stomacher, ruff, and high head-gear, composed the court costume of the time of Elizabeth; the other—charming and piquant—in the red silk skirt, tinsel cuirass, and natty hat, that designated her as the "Daughter of the Regiment."

I stood confused. Which was Ettie?—which Beatrice? The attire of one added to, and the other's detracted from, her height. My confusion deepened as they walked across the room, for the one that I had decided was Ettie walked in the stately way that characterized Beatrice.

At length, I hazarded a guess.

"Ettie," I said, staying my lady of the Elizabethan time.

A double peal of laughter greeted my ears, both ladies unmasked, and I found that I had made a mistake—that was Beatrice, and "La Fille," who had deceived me with her stately steps, was my wife.

"I did not think we would succeed so well," said Ettie, gleefully.

I could not understand her mirth. Again I doubted the reality of the other morning's occurrence.

"Nor I," returned Beatrice. "Do you believe you will know us now, guardy?"

"It would be strange if I did not—would it not, Ettie?"

That was an overture to peace.

"Not at all," accompanying her words with a meaning smile.

"Is that a thrust at my stupidity, or is it that you wish to disagree as usual?"

"Anything you please."

Peter put an end to this unpleasantness by announcing the arrival of the carriage.

We rode in silence to the scene of the night's festivities, a distance of two miles.

In due course of time, we entered the brilliantly-lighted parlors; we—that is, myself, Ettie on my left, Beatrice on my right—or rather, "La Fille" on my left, and "my lady" on my right.

I will state here a fact of which I was not cognizant at the time: Ettie and Beatrice, satisfied that they could deceive me as to their identities, had exchanged costumes ere descending to the parlors, so that "La Fille" was now Beatrice, and "my lady" was Ettie, while I believed it to be vice versa.

We paid our silent *devoirs* to our hostess (who was unmasked, of course.)

Right here I will take the opportunity to say a few words regarding her.

Marian Stewart was a lady whose chief characteristic was loquaciousness. In common parlance she might be designated as a news-monger, or a gossip; but her position in society, her silks and satins, saved her from that.

She was of medium height, plump and round in form, so plain of face that she would have been called homely but for her *retroussé* nose, that gave to her

features a piquant expression that was really irresistible; eyes and hair were of a dull, dead brown, and complexion not of the clearest. Still she was much admired; there was a sprightliness—a charm in her manner, that made one forget the faultiness of feature.

We separated, and mingled with the motley throng, and I soon lost sight of "La Fille," whom I believed was my wife.

"I know you," said a voice at my elbow.

I turned, and saw our hostess.

"I would know you among a thousand, Allan Ingram," she went on. "And, of course, I know now how to find your wife and your ward. Ah! there's Ettie now," as she caught sight of "La Fille" passing along. "She was on your left, so, of course, that is Ettie. I'll go and speak to her. Oh! but isn't that sad about Oliver Waldon?"

"What now? Has that rumor been confirmed?"

"Worse than that! He's had to leave the country!"

"Indeed?" I said it gladly.

"Oh, yes! I have it from first authority—from Harry Bostwick, in fact—my very particular friend, you know. He saw Oliver off. It's too bad, isn't it? But I must go and tell your wife; she'll be sorry to hear it, of course."

That "of course" stirred my wrath.

Why should Ettie be sorry? Would she be sorry? I was reasonable enough to ask myself that.

"I will know," I said; and I drew near to the spot where Marian and Ettie were standing.

"What did you say?"

The tones were faint and tremulous.

I gnashed my teeth with rage.

"I said that Oliver Waldon has had to leave the country."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive. Harry Bostwick—my friend, you know—saw him off."

"When?"

"Last evening, I believe, or the evening before, or perhaps it was the evening before that."

"Where—where has he gone?"

"To Europe."

"I cannot credit what you tell me!"

My wife was actually swaying—she was faint!

The news of Oliver Waldon's departure had overpowered her.

Imagine my feelings.

"Oh, yes, it is so. I knew you would be sorry, Ettie."

At that she made an effort to compose herself, realizing, probably, how unguarded she had been.

"Tell me this," she said, in a tone forcedly calm, "did he leave any word for his—his friends?"

"Not any. I believe he said that he had no friends. That was a little unkind, I think, for you are his friend, and I'm sure I am. You know, I've had more toleration with his gay, insouciant ways than most people, and he has, in turn, regarded me with great friendliness. He has always spoken very highly of you, Ettie; but I can't say as much for Beatrice. How often I have twitted him about marrying her, and he has answered—now, I can rely upon you not to repeat it—has answered: 'Never!—not unless I'm in an uncommonly embarrassed financial condition, and see no other way of extricating myself.' A characteristic reply, was it not?"

I saw "La Fille" put out her hand in an uncertain way, as if she were groping about for support.

"Are you ill?" asked Marian.

"No; a little faint, that is all. I will go to the dressing-room."

"Let me attend you."

"No—no! I prefer to go alone," was the rather sharp reply.

I was so enraged, that if she had fallen before my eyes, I believe I would not have stirred a step to assist her. She disappeared, and Marian Stewart moved on, to retail this delectable morsel about my wife's agitation upon hearing of the departure of Oliver Waldon.

I went over to one of the windows with the intention to step out, and vent my anger beneath the stars. Judge of my astonishment when I saw Oliver Waldon standing there!—he had raised his mask to wipe his heated face, and thus I knew him.

I believe I would have spoken to him from sheer surprise if just then the window had not opened, and a masked figure entered from without; he entered, looked up at Oliver's face, and started back with a cry indicative of dismay and fear.

"Oliver Waldon!" he exclaimed.

"The same," was the reply, in a light, merry tone I now hated. "And I think I recognize my friend Bostwick's voice. Is't thou, my noble—But you seem agitated! Your hand trembles! Is it surprise at seeing me? Have you told that story so often about my departure for Europe that you have come to believe it yourself? You could not be more shocked if I had arisen from the dead, and appeared before you."

"No—fact—I could not. I say, old fellow," he added, trying to speak carelessly, "where were you on—let me see—on Monday night—the night after that on which you told me to circulate the report about going to Europe?"

"I can't say, friend. Why do you ask?"

"Because I was sure that I met you coming out of Ingram's place."

"Not I—it must have been my wraith. I hope you paid it proper respect."

He evidently saw me standing by then, for he put his arm through Oliver's, and led him off ere he made any reply.

I saw that I had not been the only spectator of this scene; not three feet from me stood "my lady"—Beatrice, as I believed. Her hands were clasped together, her bosom heaved, and her breath came quick and hard.

"There's contagion in the air," I said to myself, "and the malady is surprise."

I looked at Beatrice; she started on, passing me by, and I heard her murmur:

"That diverts my suspicions. It seems like a clew." I could not understand her words then. Of what was Beatrice suspicious?

"What next?" I thought.

I had not long to wait.

"So it was all a hoax," I heard. I knew my hostess' voice.

"Yes; but no one must know it but you." It was Oliver who replied.

"Did you not run a risk then in coming here to-night?"

"To be sure, but I could not resist the desire to come and hear how my vaunted departure was regarded."

"There is one here who regards it in a way that should flatter you."

"And that one is—"

"Mrs. Ingram. She almost fainted when I told her."

"Indeed! Pray do not contradict your statement. Now, tell me how I may know her, so that I can avoid her, and the rest of her family."

"There—there's Ettie, now!" and she nodded over toward me.

Yes, there was "La Fille," standing near me, yet apparently unconscious of my proximity. She moved on just then, brushed by me in a twinkling—yet even so I heard a stifled sob beneath her mask. Out through the window she went; and as soon as I recovered from my anger, I followed. I walked the entire length of the balcony, but could not see her. I leaned upon the railing, and looked down into the garden; I made out two moving figures there, and I heard Oliver Waldon's voice:

"Mrs. Ingram, where is Beatrice?"

The reply was too faint to reach my ears.

"My darling!" then said Oliver. "I came here to-night—"

"Stop!" It did not sound like Ettie's voice to me; but then it was muffled and indistinct—that made it seem strange. "I will listen to no falsities."

"Falsities! What do you mean?"

"I mean that I believe you to be a hypocrite; I know now that which I have always feared."

"This from you?"

"Yes, from me. I have heard that to-night which makes us strangers henceforth. When you confide in any one again, choose another than Marian Stewart."

"I can explain all that you have heard."

"Of course you can. Your hypocrite always can explain. I wish never to see you again, Oliver Waldon. I can love, and I can hate; you have gained that latter by being false with me. Never—never will I acknowledge you!"

"Oh, this is hard. Will you not let me speak?"

"Not to me, sir; I will not listen to a word. Now, Oliver Waldon, go! and never try to see me again."

"Oh, you must listen—"

"No! Since you will not leave me, I will leave you. Good-night and good-by; understand me when I say good-by forever!"

What could I think of this?—this interview between my wife and Oliver Waldon?

I stood in silent wrath for some time; then I turned to re-enter the parlors, and I came face to face with "La Fille."

She recoiled, uttering a cry of dismay.

"We will go at once, Ettie," I said, sternly.

She merely bowed.

"At once, if you please," I repeated.

Without a word, she left me.

My wrath was so great that I scarcely realized anything.

I did not notice that "La Fille" was still masked as I conducted her to the carriage; I did not once think of Beatrice.

We rode home in silence.

As we entered the house, I remembered my ward. Explaining to Ettie in as few words as possible, I left her, and was driven rapidly back.

Much to my chagrin, I learned that Beatrice had gained other escort, and was probably at home by this time.

Back again I went, and ascended hastily to Ettie's rooms, determined to have a full explanation of the evening's incidents.

This time I did not open the door quietly and reverently, but quickly, passionately.

I had been transfixed with amazement before upon finding that Ettie was there; how can I describe my feelings now upon finding that Ettie was *not* there?

Before me, on a chair, was the costume of "La Fille."

As I entered, I saw on the table a sheet of paper that contained the following:

"I have gone from you, Allan. If we meet again, there will be much to explain; if we do not, you will never know why I have taken this step. Do not try to find me. For your own sake, heed these words."

"ETTIE."

CHAPTER VI.

THUNDERBOLTS.

I WILL say nothing of my grief.

I tried to learn how Ettie had gone, but could not. Beatrice knew nothing of it, and Peter solemnly assured me that no one had left the house between the time of my coming with Ettie and my second return.

Surely I had seen her home—seen her enter the house; if she had not left it, she must be in it.

Peter and I searched from cellar to garret, but in

vain; Ettie was gone. How, and where?—that was the mystery.

I sat in my library, on the following morning, brooding over the sad state of affairs in the household.

Where had Ettie gone?—that was my query.

I decided, after varied and painful thought, that she must have gone to her home in the country—gone, to avoid the explanation that she knew I would demand.

I determined to go there during the day, and see her.

I pictured our interview to myself, rehearsing what I would say, and how I would demean myself. I would be gentle and tender, and try to win her back to my heart and home.

The imaginary interview ended in complete reconciliation, of course.

When I arrived at that point I actually smiled with satisfaction.

So earnest was I in my fancies, that it seemed almost as if that blessed result had really been brought about.

Peter entered with the morning mail.

There were very few letters this morning—two or three business letters for myself, and one for Beatrice.

The hot blood rushed to my face as I recognized the hand that had traced her name—Oliver Waldon's; I knew it well.

Then I made another discovery. It had been posted after midnight—after that interview with my wife had taken place. It probably contained some word in reference to that.

There was a secret in the house, I knew; and the coming of this letter at this juncture, addressed to Beatrice, from him, plainly proved to me that she was one of the conspirators.

"She must marry Leonard Waldon!" I cried, in my wrath.

I sent for her immediately.

She entered, more severe than I had ever seen her yet, it seemed to me.

She was deathly pale; her amber hair seemed smoother and silkier than ever, and her black dress more startling in contrast.

If my mind had not been so engrossed with my wife, I should have thought that my ward had met with some heavy sorrow since the previous night.

I passed the letter to her, and watched her closely. I smiled grimly as I saw her start and clutch the missive convulsively; then crushing it in her hand, and looking the very incarnation of hate, she turned as if to go.

"Beatrice," I said, firmly, "you will read it here."

She faced me defiantly. Before she had time to say a word, I repeated, still more firmly:

"You will read it here. In this instance you *must* recognize my authority. That letter is from Oliver Waldon—"

She started again.

"Yes, I know his writing well. Strange things have happened here of late; you may, or you may not understand what I mean; that causes me to *insist* upon your reading it here, and after that you will allow me to read it."

She looked at me, her eyes glittering, her lips set in a thin, hard line.

"Very intractable," I murmured.

She surprised me by obeying; she opened the letter, and stood facing me as she read it.

For the benefit of the reader I will give its contents here, as I learned them at a later date.

"BEATRICE, MY WIFE: I cannot accept the harsh decree you uttered last night. You are not cruel—why will you allow your mind to be swayed by what you hear? You know my nature—light, frivolous, thoughtless at times—and how I often speak without meaning; in one thing only have I been earnest, and that is in my love for you; of that I have been so jealous that I have resorted to every artifice to keep it from the knowledge of the gossips. Do you not know that Marian Stewart is leader of that band?"

"You became my wife the other evening. I willingly bend to the peculiar restrictions you have placed upon me in regard to that event, realizing their feasibility under existing circumstances, but I cannot lose you altogether. Oh, take back your harsh words. Believe me before others. I love you—you are my wife—we *cannot* be strangers. Write to me, Beatrice, or consent to see me. For the love of Heaven, heed my prayer."

"Your husband, OLIVER."

She looked up as she finished, and met my gaze. Her eyes still glittered, her lips were still set in that thin, hard line; not the quiver of a muscle told of any emotion.

I put out my hand for the letter. She reared her head defiantly, and with utmost deliberation tore the sheet into bits.

I was speechless with rage. She quietly walked to the fireplace, threw the bits into the grate, stood there till the flames had consumed them, and then, without a word, left the room.

It was some time before I recovered from my wrath; then I bounded to my feet, crying:

"She shall marry Leonard Waldon, and at once. I cannot have one here who will thus aid and abet my wife."

It was afternoon ere I was sufficiently composed to think of what I would do next. I would go to Ettie's country home. It was now four o'clock; I would start at once, and so reach my destination before six.

My complacency returned as I thought of the reconciliation I had pictured, and I started to make my exit from the house with a smile upon my lips.

"There's all my worldly belongings in that ere bag, and these city doors ain't no way safe: just take it right along up stairs, and tell your missus I'm here."

Those words, uttered in a high, cracked voice, fell on my ear, and I saw, standing by the door, an antiquated-looking female, flourishing a blue cotton umbrella, and issuing her orders to Peter, who, to say the least, looked dismayed.

How can I describe my feelings? I took one survey of the small, bent figure, arrayed in a scant skirt of black silk, a light green shawl with palm-leaf border, a chocolate-colored bonnet, a figured lace veil, and brown cotton gloves. Then I retreated to my library, and exclaimed in my despair:

"Good God, her aunt! What shall I do now?"

I realized that there was no time for delay. I must out at once. Her coming just now told me that Ettie had not gone to her home.

"Where—where?" I wailed.

But I could not dwell on that painful query; I must out, and so speak to this unwelcome aunt, that she would gain no suspicion of the unpleasant state of affairs in the household. I would not acknowledge to any one that Ettie and I were unhappy, and I loved my wife so well that I would stoop to any subterfuge to serve her.

With a sickly smile upon my face, I hastened out into the hall, greeted my guest, led her into the sitting-room, and placed her before the glowing grate fire.

She was a perfect specimen of a country spinster. Not all her intercourse with Ettie's mother (who was a cultivated woman, and had been in her youth a city belle), and with her brother, Ettie's father, (who was an educated man, and a gentleman farmer) had had any effect upon her old-fashioned ways.

"I cannot allow her from my sight for a moment!" I groaned, inwardly, while with a bland smile, I said, aloud:

"You're very welcome, Aunt Phoebe. I hope you've come to stay."

"Oh, no, yes. I've come to make quite a distended visit," she piped, as she untied her bonnet strings. "But where's Et—ain't she to hum?"

I thought I had prepared myself for this question, but when it came, and felt the little woman's keen, bead-like eyes upon me, I grew confused, and wondered if it would be safe for me to tell the falsity I had determined upon.

"Ettie—Ettie," I stammered. "You mean Ettie—"

"Yes, Ettie—she's your wife, ain't she? Leastways, you married her. I calkerlated that you'd know something about her."

Spinster-like, she was bitter regarding the marriage relation.

"Of course—of course," I hastened to say, really put out by her sarcastic tone. "The fact is, hem—the fact is, she—that is, Ettie has gone away on a visit."

"I want to know—has she?"

"Yes. I miss her very much."

"Do you, poor soul? Has she been gone long?"

"A few days."

"Is that so? When does she calkerlate to come back?"

"Not for some time, I'm afraid."

"Do tell! That's too bad! I ain't sot eyes on her sence you took her off from our village. I reckon she's happy?"

"Oh, yes; we get along charmingly together."

"Do you? I didn't think you would. I used to say to Ettie—says I: 'Et, he's too old for you—'"

I coughed. The little woman, not at all disconcerted, went on:

"He's too old for you, Ettie. He'll forget that you're young, and you'll never agree." Ain't had no quarrels, eh?"

"Oh, no."

"Now, ain't that beautiful? Only just to think of it! I hope it'll last. Seldom does—seldom does," and she smoothed out the folds in her green shawl in a sad sort of a way. "Well," she added, brightening up, "I'm here, and I'd just as lief stay a month as not, though I hope she'll come home before that. I've riz up for the first time in my life; I ain't never had no hankering to see the world before; but now I'm here, and I'm going to be took around by you. I've been a-slicking of myself up," as she complacently stroked her glossy silk skirt, "and I'm ready to go anywhere."

I will pass over the few days of torture that followed. What with my fear that Aunt Phoebe should learn the truth, my grief and my anxiety at my wife's continued absence, and my endeavors to keep up appearances, I was at my wits' end.

Beatrice added to my distress by mentioning that we had invitations to a dinner at Bostwick's. I had entirely forgotten that. It was to take place on the following evening. The invitations had come before the masquerade; to send in our regrets at this late date would not only be a breach of etiquette, but it would be the signal for surmise and conjecture to commence.

"Better act boldly," I thought, "or the gossips will begin to sift for facts."

We decided to go, and we went.

As I entered the parlor my heart sank; each guest looked up at me wonderingly.

"Your wife—where is she?" was the query that sounded on every side.

"Away on a visit," was my invariable reply.

I tried hard to preserve a semblance of cheerfulness; I felt that I was succeeding poorly. I fancied that it could be read upon my face, that I was ill at ease, and unhappy.

Mrs. Bostwick was an invalid; a cheerful woman, however, very fond of company, though unable to leave her room. These dinner reunions were of frequent occurrence in her house; she could not mingle with the guests, of course, but she always sat in state in her room and received them.

I thought of her, and decided to kill the time that

was hanging so heavily on my hands by paying my *devoirs* to her.

Her reception-room, as it was called, was beyond the conservatory that opened from the parlors. In passing through that I saw that Mrs. Bostwick was engaged with a guest; upon looking again, I saw that the guest was Marian Stewart; and then I saw more, a young woman, Mrs. Bostwick's nurse, evidently, for she stood by a small table, holding in her hands a tray containing a light repast, and was lost in listening to the conversation that was being carried on.

I fell to wondering why her face seemed so familiar to me; then my attention was attracted by what Marian Stewart was saying.

"Have you heard about Mrs. Ingram?"

"No. What about her?"

"She has left her husband!"

"No! You don't say so!"

"I do. It's a fact. He is here, this evening, and is trying hard to keep up appearances. But you see, I know more than people give me credit for. I understand it all pretty well."

"Well, what is it?"

"Of course, you know that she married old Ingram for his money—everybody knows that; and, as is perfectly natural, she turns for sympathy to one who is more her equal in years. Haven't you heard that that one is Oliver Waldon?"

"No."

"Oh, yes, indeed, it is so. I wasn't quite positive about it till the other night. She was at our *bal masque*, you know—she came as 'La Fille du Regiment.' Well, I told her about Oliver Waldon's departure for Europe—and you should have seen her! She all but fainted, she was so overcome! Just think of it! Of course, that is why they have separated."

"And Oliver Waldon is away, you say?"

"Yes," hesitatingly. "That is the report."

"Both away—that looks significant. Eh, Marian?"

Crash!—went the tray, and the articles thereon; and the nurse stood looking half-dismayed, half-angry, at the invalid and her guest.

I saw that she was trembling—I caught the flash of her eye, and a suspicion darted into my mind.

She turned from the questioning looks leveled upon her, a proud, bitter smile upon her lips, and started to the door that led out to the garden. Like a flash she disappeared. I stepped out of the conservatory window, and leaped down to the ground. In the dim moonlight I could make out a fleeing figure. I followed in hot haste, and overtook her. I heard a sob, a moan; I placed my hand upon her shoulder, and said, softly:

"Ettie."

My suspicion had been correct. With a low, sharp cry she faced me—it was my wife.

CHAPTER VII.

FALSE, OR TRUE.

THE moon, now on the wane, gave but little light. I could just see Ettie's eyes, glowing like two balls of fire as they met mine.

We stood beneath a large tree, through which the October wind moaned fitfully, sending down a shower of leaves that fell about us in a stealthy, ghost-like way. It was all so weird, so soft and low and mysterious, seeming like a premonition of evil; and that, combined with the strange conduct of my wife, tortured me till I was fairly beside myself.

"Ettie," I had said, and she had turned on me with a sharp cry.

Thus we stood in silence for several moments.

"Allan, you here!" she exclaimed, in what seemed to be a reproachful tone.

"Yes. Why?" I asked, coldly.

"I did not think you'd come—alone."

"You thought I would sit and mope for the rest of my days because you were gone, I suppose."

"I suppose I did," she said, wearily.

"It is strange that you could expect that after leaving me in such an unaccountable way."

"I know it is."

Her humility exasperated me more than defiance could have done, for it seemed like a confession of her wrong-doing. I said, hotly:

"Did you think your thralldom over me was so great—that I was so abject a slave, that however slightly I was treated—however little respect was paid me, I would still mourn and grieve for you?"

"Then you did not care—my absence was nothing to you?" Her voice was full of pain.

"How could it be? After all that has happened."

"What—what has happened?" she asked, sharply.

"You ask me what?" I cried, angrily. "When you left your home so secretly that no one knew of your exit, to avoid the explanation you knew I would demand! You can stand there and ask me then—what has happened?" Do you not know that I both saw and heard as Marian Stewart told you of Oliver Waldon's departure for Europe? Do you not know that I both saw and heard as you met that miscreant in the garden? Why did you acquaint me with your disguise? Had I not known that, I might now feel less assured of my wife's falsity. One so skilled in duplicity—so practiced a hypocrite as you—

"Stop, Allan Ingram!" she interrupted. "You have said enough—and more than enough. Oh, how keenly you will regret those words some day!"

"Never!" I cried.

"Never! Ha—ha!" she laughed, tauntingly. "Why, Allan Ingram, at this very moment—this very moment, understand—I could make you crouch at my feet, and crave for pardon for having spoken so to me! Yes, I could make you bow your head to the dust—"

"You are getting to be both theatrical and non-

sensical," I sneered. "Do you think I am a fool, madame?"

"Yes—I do!" she snapped.

"What!" Oh, it seemed as if I could not contain myself at that! I fairly danced with my rage.

"I tell you—you are a fool! Would you like to know why? Because you doubt your wife."

"Great Heavens!" I cried. "Have you taken leave of your senses? Doubt my wife! How can I do else? Can I dispute the evidence of my own eyes and ears? Did I not see and hear for myself! And have not your own actions added conviction to it all? Oh—oh! how inscrutable are the ways of women—indeed—indeed, they are past all finding out! Are you mad, Ettie? Would to God you were—rather than, than unfaithful."

"I am neither one nor the other," she replied, proudly. "Neither mad nor unfaithful."

"The fond belief you have in your innocence is almost amusing, madame—it would be were it in another but my wife."

"And the persistency with which you believe me false and unfaithful is almost amusing, sir—it would be were it in another but my husband."

"Heavens, Ettie, you'll drive me mad!"

"Would to God I could!" she cried, mockingly.

"Rather than suspicious."

"Have I not good cause?—tell me that. If there is any way in which you can prove that I do you injustice, in Heaven's name, prove it at once!"

I believe I screamed these words, so full of agony and anger was I.

"There is a way, Allan—"

"Then at once—at once! Prove it at once!"

"I cannot."

"Cannot—cannot! and why?"

"Because of a solemn promise—a vow I have made."

"To whom?"

"That I am not at liberty to tell."

"Oh, this is nonsense! rubbish! You cannot expect me to believe it, Ettie."

"Of course not. You are too unreasonable; too stubborn; too fond of your own opinions; too old and set in your ways, to believe anybody but yourself. But listen, Allan Ingram: I stand here and say to you, as if I were before my Maker, I am innocent of all wrong; I am true to you in thought and deed. Will you believe me?"

"Give me the proof, Ettie," I said, sternly.

Oh, I wanted to believe her; but my eyes and ears, could I doubt them?

"I cannot," she moaned.

"Give me the proof!" I cried, fiercely, taking her by the arm. "No promise, no vow can hold in such a case as this. It is your duty to clear yourself in the eyes of your husband. I have good grounds for my suspicions; you must prove that I am in the wrong, or—"

"I cannot," she interrupted, firmly.

I pushed her from me; yes, I pushed her from me rudely, muttering:

"As false as fair." Oh, how I have been deceived in you."

She stood apart, her head bowed. Suddenly she looked back at me, her hands clasped as if in agony; one moment thus, then she started as if to flee from me.

But I stayed her; I placed my hand upon her shoulder, saying:

"What now?"

"I wish to go away," she said, passionately. "I wish never to see you again. I cannot endure this longer; it is killing me—killing me. Let me go, Allan, and I will never trouble you more."

"You will do nothing of the kind, Mrs. Ingram; you will return with me at once. You are my wife, I believe."

"Yes," in, oh, such a sad tone!

"And I am your husband, I believe."

"Yes."

"Please let that relationship be remembered. It gives me authority over you; I shall exercise it now by conducting you at once to your home. I do not choose that my wife shall so deport herself as to make me a laughing-stock among all my friends. That brings me to the question I had intended to ask first of all: What does this masquerading mean? Why are you here in disguise? Does Mrs. Bostwick know who it is that is acting as her nurse?"

"No."

"Does any one know?"

"No."

"Why have you done it?"

"I will not tell you."

"What!"

"I will not tell you."

"May I presume to ask why this reticence?"

"You may presume to ask, sir, but I refuse to answer."

"I command you to tell me why!"

"You are not at all polite, Mr. Ingram," she said, coldly, releasing herself from my grasp. "If for no other reason, I would refuse to answer to a command. I can be led, but not driven. Understand me now, if you please: I will not tell you why I am here in disguise. Consideration for you makes me thus determined. After what has just occurred—you saw and heard, I suppose; you have the happy faculty of being on hand at all times to see and hear—I must resign my position as nurse to Mrs. Bostwick. It would interfere with the purpose I had in view to have it known that I have been enacting a role in this house, so I will give them no opportunity of discovering it. I will accompany you at once."

"You have decided to come home then," I sneered.

"Yes. I can do nothing else just now. Oh, spare me a little, Allan," she wailed. "I am very misera-

ble—very unhappy. Have a little mercy on me! Yes, I will go home, and perhaps—"

There was a world of hope in her tone as she went on:

"Perhaps I can give you the proof that you require."

She had neared me, and as she spoke she placed her hand upon my arm, and looked up into my face. All my heart went out in longing for her and her love. For one moment I put aside my doubts, and I drew her to me, and bent my head to hers.

It came in contact with the muslin *fanchon* that covered her wig of jet black hair—that broke the spell.

That reminded me of my wife's falsity, of which I felt so firmly convinced that only actual proof would satisfy me—it reminded me that there was much in her life that she persisted in concealing from me; it broke the spell, and I put her from me quickly, saying:

"We will go now. Of course you cannot enter that house again as you are; you will wait here while I make my adieux, and secure Leonard's escort for Beatrice; then, hatless and in this disguise, you will come with me."

I left her, speaking thus coldly, though in my heart there was great rejoicing because my wife was found. Even if strife and dissension, suspicion and doubt, were to be the order of the day, my house would be home, and I would be content, while she was with me.

I made my adieux, informed Miss Stewart triumphantly that my wife had returned from her visit, told Beatrice that Leonard Waldon would wait upon her, and then I joined Ettie, and we hastily entered the carriage and were driven home.

I informed Ettie of her aunt's arrival, and she, to my great relief, was as desirous of hiding our unhappiness from the little woman as I had been.

We succeeded in entering the house unseen.

Aunt Phoebe, thanks to her primitive habits, had retired. Ettie hurried to her room to change her attire, after begging of me to wait in the evening room for the return of Beatrice.

I sat there alone, musing. I must confess, pleasantly, for above a strange reserve in Ettie's manner, I had detected, or fancied that I had detected, the joy, the gladness that one feels upon a return to home and loved ones.

Had she come to me then and repeated her solemn assurance of innocence, which I in my passion had refused to believe without proof, I would have taken her to my heart, and promised to forgive and forget all; but, as usual, my good intentions were all frustrated—this time by the coming of Beatrice and Leonard.

I looked up, impatiently. How very severe Beatrice appeared.

"What has happened to her?" I asked myself. "A less devoted admirer than Leonard, would be discouraged by one glance at her. He appears pleased; I hope he has improved this opportunity."

"Ettie will be down presently," I said, cheerfully.

I noticed that the hard, severe look deepened on Beatrice's face at the mention of Ettie's name; I also noticed that she made no comment on the subject of her return. I don't know what I thought; I believe I resolved not to think till I had seen how they would greet each other; if coldly, I felt that my doubts would return as forcibly as ever. I knew how strict were Beatrice's principles—how she abhorred and shunned the base semblance of wrong; and if she were cold towards Ettie now, I—well, I hoped it would not be so, for it would turn the balance to Ettie's detriment.

As Leonard Waldon took his departure, I heard my wife's footsteps. I listened eagerly as they approached, trying hard to conceal that I was in suspense.

The door opened, and Ettie appeared. She stopped short as she saw Beatrice, and her hands clasped each other convulsively. Oh, how beautiful she looked! She had fastened some white flowers in her wavy brown hair; her dress was of dead black silk, relieved by a profusion of soft white lace at the throat. That was all, but it suited her pale, rather sad face, as well.

My heart sank as I witnessed the greeting. Ettie stepped forward eagerly, and grasped Beatrice's hand. I heard her whisper:

"I am in trouble. You alone can help me. Oh, will you?"

Beatrice looked at her, her face set and rigid, her lips thin and compressed, and answered nothing.

Oh, the contrast between the two! one pleading, imploring—the other standing as stern as justice, her very attitude seeming to say: "With justice there is no mercy."

"She doubts Ettie," I wailed in my heart. "She has aided her hitherto; but for some reason, she now turns from her."

Ettie turned to me despairingly, saying:

"Allan, tell Beatrice what you have heard this evening."

"I did. When I had finished, Ettie turned again to Beatrice, saying imploringly:

"Will you let this go on? Must I suffer—"

I could not understand the low, icy interruption that I heard:

"I will never acknowledge it! never! To clear you I must confess all—and that I can not, will not do, for I hate him! Break your promise—your vow, if you choose; clear yourself if you will—but I will not aid you with a word! I would sooner lose my life!"

"And I must endure this?" Ettie moaned. She was very pale, and her hands were pressed over her heart, as if she would still its tumultuous beating. "Beatrice, I beg of you," she went on. "Be just to him, be merciful to me, and speak! Think what

your silence imposes upon us both! and for the love of heaven, speak?"

"Not one word."

"Oh, how can you be so cruel! I plead not only for myself, but also for him."

So—she loved him so well—the miscreant—that she wished to shield him. My jealousy was not assuaged by what I heard; instead, it raged more fiercely than ever.

"Beatrice—Beatrice!" pleaded Ettie.

"It is useless—utterly useless! I will never speak! You can, if you will break your vow; but I never will!"

With these words she turned coldly away.

Ettie stood for a moment, her uplifted face full of agony; then, with her hands still pressed over her heart, she faced me, moaning:

"I cannot give you the proof, Allan. You must believe me false—always."

She looked wistfully at me—I did not move, nor speak. With a low, wailing cry, she sank into a chair, and buried her face in her hands.

CHAPTER VIII.

HAPS AND MISHAPS.

ANOTHER day dawned—a glorious October day. I stood and looked out upon the beauties of nature, so calm, so peaceful, beneath the rays of the morning sun—so great a contrast to the tumult within me. It was a relief when I was attracted from the contemplation of the scene by catching sight of Aunt Phoebe's diminutive form out in the grounds.

She was walking about as briskly as if she had a certain distance to accomplish in a certain time; and she was bobbing her head, and gesticulating as earnestly as if she were haranguing an audience. An energetic little body she was, quick-witted and keen, though she did make mistakes in the use of her words, as when she told our servants that "she wouldn't give her clothes out to any of them foundries to be washed."

Vague misgivings entered my mind as I watched her now; why, I do not know, unless it was because her actions hinted some of plotting.

"She may have her own opinion about Ettie's visit and sudden return," I thought, "and she will go to work to find out all the whys and wherefores in her own way—and that will be an unique way, I'll wager."

Enter Ettie, looking pale and sweet in her morning-robe of black and blue.

I spoke abruptly:

"Will you kindly endeavor to smile? Your pensive air will surely publish the fact of our unhappiness. A smile, however wooden, may deceive your respected relative."

"I am glad to know that you have left ever so little shame, as to wish to conceal your unkindness toward me."

"Could you not as readily have said something pleasant, Ettie? Is it necessary to be so caustic always?"

"I profit by example, you see."

"Now, have I said one word this morning?"

"Yes; you found fault with me immediately that I entered your presence."

"I only ventured to advise you a little."

"It was not necessary, sir. I am as anxious as you can be to hide the terrible mistake I made in marrying you."

"You are frank, madame," I said, between my teeth.

I heard the door creak, faintly. I looked out; Aunt Phoebe was no longer on the grounds.

"It is she," I thought.

The door opened slowly. I caught a glimpse of her brown stuff gown, and I said to Ettie, in the gentlest of tones:

"Will you have the paper, my love?"

She looked at me in amazement. I nodded toward the door. She seemed to understand, for she answered, sweetly:

"Oh, no, dear! I couldn't think of depriving you of it."

"But I am quite through with it, my love; indeed, I am."

"Now, I am sure you're making a sacrifice for me, dear."

"Not at all. There, take this chair; no, take this one, then the sun will not shine in your eyes. I can't have the sun shining in your eyes, you know, my love. Will you have a footstool? or, do you prefer the fender?"

"The fender, by all means, dear; the footstool is too soft. I hate anything soft!" and she darted a glance at me that pointed her words at me beyond a doubt.

"Thank you!" I muttered, fiercely; then I added, aloud: "I'm afraid the light is too strong for your eyes, my love; shall I draw the blinds?"

Enter Aunt Phoebe, all smiles; even the little corkscrew curls that hung about her face seemed full of glee, for they bobbed and bobbed, as she advanced towards us, saying:

"Oh, how beautiful! My skirt got ketched in the door, and I heard you both. How very happy you are, to be sure."

"Oh, yes!" we said, simultaneously.

"Never have no quarrels," and she put her head on one side, and looked at us keenly.

"Oh, no!" we chimed.

"Do tell. How glad I am, to be sure! And it's like this always?"

"Always," we repeated.

"How you talk! I shall be a-watching of you, I know, for I ain't never seen such a beautiful sight. It

does my old eyes good. I'm glad I come—I'm glad I come!"

I didn't like the little woman's exuberance; it made me feel uncomfortable, for it seemed almost as if she were speaking mockingly.

"Could she have learned the truth in any way?" I asked myself.

She tripped around the room, admiring this and that, keeping up a constant chirping in her high, shrill voice; yet I felt that she was taking note of every word and action that passed between Ettie and I.

I stood by the mantel, chafing inwardly at this new discomfort, and the restraint it imposed upon me. Ettie dropped the paper. I eagerly seized the opportunity it offered me. I stooped to pick it up, rustling it considerably to drown my voice as I said:

"Pleasant, this—is it not? I could wish your aunt in—"

"Hospitable, upon my word!" snapped Ettie, a little too loud. "It's the first time any of my people have intruded here, and it shall be the last."

"In Heaven's name, hush!" I muttered, rustling the paper frantically, and looking anxiously toward Aunt Phoebe, who seemed to be engrossed with a hanging basket. "Her ears are as long, and her eyes as keen as—"

"As yours," she interrupted, in a biting whisper.

I saw Aunt Phoebe turn, and with a warning look at Ettie, I said, gently:

"I can't find it, my love. I'm afraid we'll have to give up the search."

"Yes, dear, don't trouble yourself any further."

"My sakes!" cried Aunt Phoebe, contemplating us admiringly. I had not yet arisen from my stooping posture. "That is beautiful! You are just as happy as you can be now, ain't you? Ain't a bit stiff in the joints, be you, Allan? Most men at your age can't get down in such platitudes as that."

How I do dislike any reference to my age! Fortunately, the breakfast-bell sounded out just then, or I should have shown Aunt Phoebe that all was not as perfect as she supposed, or saw fit to suppose.

Upon entering the house in the afternoon of that same day, I happened to go to the drawing-room, and there I found my wife, my ward, and Marian Stewart seated in solemn conclave. I was drawn into the circle by Miss Stewart's exclamation:

"Oh, have you heard the news?"

Of course I had not.

"You left just one moment too soon last evening," she went on, "or you would have known all about it. It's the strangest thing."

I looked at Ettie and she looked at me. She seemed annoyed—in fact, agitated. I prepared to listen with eagerness, for I expected to hear the solution to one mystery—why Ettie had assumed the disguise in which I had found her.

"Well, you must know, Mrs. Bostwick engaged a nurse a few days since. She came and asked for the place, saying that she had heard of Mrs. Bostwick's condition. Her looks were pleasing, so she was engaged at once. All went on smoothly enough till last night. We were talking, Mrs. Bostwick and I, on different subjects—"

Ettie's gaze met mine just then; her eyes were flashing ominously.

"Let me see; we were talking about Oliver Waldon, I believe. All of a sudden we heard a crash; it was the nurse—I mean that it was a tray she had dropped. We looked at her, and she looked at us most savagely; then like a flash, she darted from the room. Strange, wasn't it?" appealing to me.

"Very."

"But the strangest part is yet to be told. Mrs. Bostwick sent for her son and told him what had occurred. He seemed very much disturbed; I was surprised at that. Search was commenced at once, but she was not to be found. A few articles of clothing were in her room."

She looked keenly at Ettie for a moment, then slowly extricating a handkerchief from her pocket, she added, deliberately:

"Among them was this," holding it up to view.

I saw that Ettie was trembling; she fairly quailed as Marian looked at her again, saying abruptly:

"It is yours, Mrs. Ingram; it has your name in the corner."

Ettie reached out her hand helplessly for it. She did not say a word.

"Strange—is it not?" said Miss Stewart, looking around upon us all, and smiling in a way that seemed to tell that she had her opinion about it.

"Very," I remarked again.

"Harry Bostwick, as you all know, is a very particular friend to Oliver Waldon. If ever I should wish to learn anything about Oliver Waldon, I should apply to Harry Bostwick, too."

It was impossible to mistake the drift of her insinuation; it was as palpable as if she had said right out that she believed that Ettie had entered that house for the purpose of pursuing inquiries about Oliver Waldon.

I saw Ettie look toward Beatrice imploringly, as she had done on the previous night; I saw that Beatrice's face was as stern and set as it had been then.

Marian Stewart, smilingly unconscious, went on:

"But you should have seen how agitated Harry Bostwick became, when he found that mysterious handkerchief!—he actually grew livid."

A triumphant light leaped to Ettie's eyes at those words.

"And what do you suppose he asked me?"

Ettie, to whom this was addressed, shook her head helplessly.

"He asked me if I thought it could have been you. Of course, I scouted the idea. Now, all this is very strange. Why did the nurse leave so suddenly? How

did your handkerchief get there! Why should Harry Bostwick be so disturbed at the occurrence?"

I thought of the meeting I had witnessed at the masquerade between Harry Bostwick and Oliver Waldon. I called to mind the words I had heard "my lady of the Elizabethan time," utter—but then that had been Beatrice. Perhaps Ettie had been by also, and had heard Bostwick say that he had met some one coming out of Ingram's place on that Monday night; if that were so, then I could understand why she had assumed her disguise; her suspicions had been diverted from me, and she had sought to find another guilty, in order to prove me innocent.

This discovery lessened my sense of injury, and softened my heart toward Ettie. I waited impatiently for Miss Stewart's departure, longing to have a word with my wife alone. I thought she would never go, but she did, at last. I sighed with relief as she and Beatrice left the room.

"Ettie, come here," I said, softly.

She obeyed, wonderingly, and I thought, gladly.

I put my arm about her, and drew her to me, as I said:

"So you have been playing detective, Ettie."

"Yes."

"And you think you understand Harry Bostwick's agitation?"

She looked up at me in amazement.

"I think I do," she said, at length, slowly.

"Do you believe him guilty, Ettie? What could his motive have been?"

She started from me with a sharp cry. What had I done? Did it pain her like this, to be reminded of her brother's sad death?

Her livid lips moved convulsively; at length, she whispered, hoarsely:

"What do you know of—how do you know—"

She could get no further. She stood before me, her face pale, her eyes blazing with despair, the very impersonation of agony.

I stepped to her with extended hands, saying:

"Ettie—Ettie, what does this mean?"

She started back, warding me off wildly, and before I could realize what she was about, she had darted from the room.

"Well!" I exclaimed. "What now?"

It burst upon me like a sudden flash of light—Ettie's suspicions were again directed to me. How stupidly I had stumbled into an acknowledgment of the deed. Of course she believed me guilty now. How was she to know that I had followed her this morning? My knowledge of the deed seemed like positive proof of my guilt. And this was the consequence of the good intention that had been mine when I had called Ettie to me.

I became resentful in a moment. Why should she spurn me on suspicion? Was she so immaculate that it was contamination for her to approach me? Again I vowed that if she could believe me guilty of so heinous a deed I would never clear myself in her eyes—never!

I paced up and down the floor as fiercely as any lion ever paced his narrow cage. A sharp, high voice startled me.

"Such exercise is good for to keep off the rheumatism."

I turned quickly, and saw Aunt Phoebe's smiling face peering in through the half-open door.

"I'm looking for Et," she added. "She said she'd fix my cap while I took my nap. I calkerlated she'd be with you."

It was with great effort that I gave a mild reply. She withdrew, and I began my pacing again, thinking angrily of my wife who was not true to me, and who had the audacity to suspect me of a crime.

Exhausted at last, I leaned upon the mantel.

The room was quite dark, for evening was at hand; but I was too much disturbed to think of lights.

The door opened, and again Aunt Phoebe peered in.

"All alone?" she said.

I thought her voice did not sound so high and sharp as usual.

"I hope I don't obtrude," she added, as she entered and came over to the mantel, and stood beside me.

I could barely make out her figure in the deepening darkness, and her face was averted from me.

A deep sigh, and then she said:

"I feel low-spirited to-night. You see, I've been a dreaming of Herbert. Of course you know who Herbert is."

"Oh, yes, Ettie's brother."

"He's away to sea, you know—leastways, he went to sea two years ago. We were expecting of him home just about now, and he ain't come. His ma and pa is dreadful worried for fear something's happened to him."

"What could happen to him?"

"Much; he might have been murdered."

I started violently. Had she any inkling of the truth? How could that be possible?

"What are you starting for?" she cried, fiercely, facing me. "Something has happened to him, and you know of it!"

I endeavored to expostulate.

"I won't listen to you!" she cried, in a fury, her hands working nervously, her little curls bobbing wildly about her head. "I've always been afraid that something would happen to him, and it has! I've been a dreaming of him! I saw him in the water—dead—drowned! It's true, I know it is, and you know it, too!"

"Great Heaven!" I cried, completely astounded.

"You dreamed that?"

"Yes; and it's true; tell me, is it not? He is dead—drowned?"

"Yes." The word fell involuntarily from my lips.

"And you know who did it?"

Amazement made me speechless.

I stood looking at her blankly. "You do—you do!" she cried, wringing her hands. "You know all about it!" One deep groan, and then she caught my arm, and whispered, hoarsely: "Not a word of this—do you hear? Not to Ettie—not to any one. You and I alone know of it. Oh, God—oh, God, what misery!"

In another moment I was standing alone in the room, as bewildered as it is possible for a man to be. Was it not incredible that she should have dreamed of that which had actually transpired?

I was still lost in the maze into which this episode had plunged me, when dinner was announced.

I repaired to the dining-room, scarcely realizing where I was going. There I was aroused from my bewilderment by beholding Aunt Phoebe, smiling and chirping as usual.

I stopped short, and stared at her. She looked at me with not the least consciousness in her face.

I passed my hand over my eyes, and stared again. "Yes, it's me," she said, merrily. "Eyesight failing, eh? You ought to be a-taking of a nap every day, Allan, same as I do; it'll set you right up, and make you as chipper as a cricket. Now, I've been asleep ever sence I asked you about Ettie—"

"What!" I cried. "Eh?" looking at me sharply.

"Did you not come in again—?"

"Aunt Phoebe walks in her sleep," broke in Ettie.

"La, now, have I been a-doing of that?" laughed the little woman. "Do tell!"

"Did she appear to you, Allan?" asked Ettie.

"Yes—yes, I suppose so," I muttered, looking in a dazed way at my wife's very pale face.

A doubt was in my mind—a vague suspicion was struggling for expression. My query was:

"Had Aunt Phoebe appeared to me?"

CHAPTER IX.

A TEMPORARY LULL.

THE more I pondered over this last mysterious occurrence, the more bewildered did I become.

I could not understand it, and conjecture only disturbed me. I tried to force it from my mind, but in vain.

Oh! how would it all end? Affairs seemed to be at a climax now. What next?

It was scarcely possible that the tempest that was raging in the household could increase in fury; it was certainly at its fiercest now. I could not hope that it would abate. Was it possible that it could continue as it was?

I passed an hour of keenest torture, seeing before me the pale face of Aunt Phoebe, like a figure in a nightmare; then I felt that I could endure it no longer—this endeavor to preserve a semblance of peace and concord, while the passions were running riot within me.

I unceremoniously left the trio, called for my horse and light wagon, and was soon driving at a break-neck rate along the road, with no purpose in view save that of forgetting my misery for a time.

One mile, two miles, three miles—still no thought of turning back—still no thought of how my absence would be regarded by those at home; reckless even of Aunt Phoebe's opinion.

On—on I drove, faster and faster, along the dark and lonely road.

The sky was overcast, and I had neither starlight nor moonlight to guide me.

I was cognizant of nothing but my own thoughts. I neither saw nor heard anything, but urged my horse recklessly on—on.

At last, I believe I heard a voice shouting ahead of me, and saw the sudden flashing of a light.

I felt as if I were falling, and I made an effort to keep myself up—then came a blank.

I opened my eyes upon a peaceful scene; a room flooded with the subdued light that came in through the blue silk curtains at the windows; elegant bits of furniture, with heavy walnut frames and blue silk stuffing, were disposed tastefully about. In the long mirror opposite, I saw myself lying upon a bed, from which the silken drapery was partially drawn, and seated by a table in the center of the room I saw my wife, who was apparently engrossed with the book in her hand.

I soon realized where I was—at home; then I tried to think what it all meant—but in vain. My thoughts became confused, darkness seemed to settle around me, and there seemed to be an upheaval of all my faculties; out of the chaos only one thing arose distinctly, and that was the form of Ettie.

I could see her sweet face, and her lovely eyes, both full of tenderness; and I could feel her hand upon my brow. I did not know then whether it were a dream or reality; I only realized a delicious sense of peace and rest, and felt a desire never to awaken if that would break the spell.

I suppose I slept, for when I opened my eyes again the room was shrouded in the gloom of the coming night. By the red light of the fire burning low in the grate, I saw Ettie still seated by the table, her head bowed upon her hand. I did not try to think this time; I sought at once to prove if what I saw were reality.

"Ettie," I said, timidly.

I must confess that I half-feared that at a word the vision would vanish.

She sprang up quickly, and came to me. No, it had not been a dream. I saw the sweet face, and the lovely eyes, both full of tenderness, and I felt again the gentle touch of her hand.

She whispered softly:

"Allan, do you know me?"

"Ettie, my darling," I cried, my voice tremulous with joy.

"Thank God!"

I felt a tear fall upon my face; then she pressed her lips to mine, and murmured again:

"Thank God!"

In those blissful moments I remembered nothing of what had been. I only realized that my wife was near me, loving and tender as I had wished her to be. It was a time of unalloyed joy, for my heart's longings were satisfied.

"You have been very—very ill, Allan, for nearly two weeks. We did not think you would recover."

Her voice broke there, and she knelt down beside the bed, and clung to me as if she feared that I would leave her even yet.

"And you would have cared, Ettie?" I asked, eagerly.

"Cared!" she sobbed. "Oh, Allan, I didn't know how I loved you till there was danger of losing you! Oh, if you had died, my darling, how could I have lived?"

"That problem need not be solved now," I said, gladly. "I am thankful that I have been near death's door, since it has given me your love again. My darling! my Ettie!" and I stroked her head fondly.

"How did it happen, dear?"

"A collision; you were driving very fast, and the result was an accident. You were brought home—oh, I shall never forget it! We thought you were dead then. In that moment I realized how dear you were to me! I have not left you since, Allan. Oh, I have felt as if I could not do enough to atone for all the sorrow I have caused! I love you so dearly, and I will cling to you in spite of everything. Father, mother, brother, are nothing to me in comparison with my husband! You are first with me, Allan—in spite of everything!"

Those last words of hers, uttered so emphatically, grated harshly on my ears even then; and they brought to mind all the discomfort from which I had escaped only by losing consciousness.

Still I was happy—very happy; with Ettie's hand in mine, and her voice falling gently on my ear, I felt that I could not ask for more.

I gained rapidly, and my period of convalescence promised to be short. I almost regretted that, for it was such a peaceful, blissful time. Ettie's tenderness was unremitting; everything unseemly was forgotten as I looked into her eyes, and read the love expressed there. Not a word passed between us about the past; we both shunned the subject, knowing that it would create discord again.

Oh, if this could have endured always! But the serpent will enter every Eden; if driven out, he will come again, and again, so long as we lend a willing ear to his subtleties.

The fifth day of my convalescence I had walked about the room for the first time, and I was quite exhausted; I was now seated before the fire in a large arm-chair. Ettie had propped me up with pillows, bathed my head, fluttered about me ministering to my wants, talking the while so tenderly; and I was content.

"I must leave you for a moment, Allan," she then said.

She knew how jealous I was of her absence—I could not bear to have her out of my sight; but instead of wearying her, it seemed to please her.

"Only for a moment," she added, kissing me lightly; then she hurried to the adjoining room—her sitting-room—leaving the door ajar.

I leaned my head back upon the pillow, and commenced to think of the blissful change that had come to our lives. The scratch of a pen from the other room attracted my attention. What a jealous wretch I was! Just that slight sound turned the current of my thoughts entirely.

To whom was she writing? She had no correspondents, to my knowledge; she wrote occasionally to her parents—but such a letter would engross more than a moment of time. Of course, she might be writing a note to some friend; but if so, would she not have said so? It was the old story:

"Trifles light as air, are, to the jealous,
Confirmation strong as proofs of holy writ."

My peace was gone—just at the scratch of a pen!

"Ettie," I called.

"Well, dear?"

"What are you doing?"

A pause—the noise of the pen ceased; I fancied she was taken aback, for her voice was changed, as she replied:

"I am writing."

"To whom?"

"I'm afraid your illness has made you inquisitive, Allan."

That was the first approach to irritation that I had during my illness; it seemed like the dawn of a revival of the quarrels.

"You used to give me credit for that before, Ettie."

"Oh, Allan, don't begin again! We've been so happy—don't mar it now. Do try and keep your temper."

"Don't be unreasonable, Ettie; it is you, not I, who are provoking this discussion. If you had answered my question at once, without attempting to parry it, these few words might have been saved."

"Well, then," she said, impatiently, "I am writing to a friend."

"Very definite. Thank you. You have your reasons for not telling me, I suppose."

I heard a sigh, then the sound of the pen passing rapidly over the paper. I listened angrily. I next heard Ettie arise, and walk quickly from the room out into the hall.

As she closed the door behind her, I arose, weak as

I was, and tottered into her room, over to her escritoire. I don't know what I expected to find; I felt as if I might learn something by going there.

Ettie was not the most methodical person in the world, and as was characteristic, she had left paper, envelopes, pens, etc., scattered about. My eyes fell upon a piece of blotting-paper; it was quite clean with the exception of the marks of what seemed to be an address. I took it up quickly, held it to the light, and read just what my jealousy had suggested—the name and address of Oliver Waldon.

I flung it down violently—it fell upon the floor.

"Let her find it there!" I cried, in my wrath. "She will know that some one has touched it, and she will surmise that it was I. Hypocrite! dissembler! fawning about me, whispering in love-tones to me, caressing me, wheedling me into the belief that she loves me! Bah! what a fool's paradise have I been in! It serves her purpose to be tender now. And I have been reposing in the fond belief that it was from her heart! Oh, fool—fool that I have been! She is false—false! 'as false as fair!'"

I tottered back to my chair, all peace, all comfort gone. I heard her footfall, and quickly I resolved to say nothing, but to wait and watch.

She came in to me from the adjoining room. I saw how anxiously, how wistfully she regarded me, and I knew that she understood how the piece of blotting-paper had become displaced; she said nothing, only regarded me in that anxious, wistful way. She ministered to my wants as tenderly as before—she bore my coldness and impatience without a murmur; it had no effect upon me, however, for I rated it all as duplicity.

So we were drifting back to the old estranged state! I maintained my self-imposed silence till the following day; then as Ettie hung over me, gently stroking my forehead, and talking softly to me, I broke out suddenly, passionately:

"You act well, Ettie. It must be a great tax on your powers of endurance—why do you not spare yourself a little?"

She looked at me, a world of reproach in her lovely eyes.

"Oh, Allan," she began, then drawing her handkerchief from her pocket, she turned aside to hide her tears.

I should have been amazed at such an unusual exhibition of emotion had not my attention been attracted by scrap of paper that had fallen from her pocket.

I was determined to become possessed of it. I sent her on some trivial, unnecessary errand, and then I picked it up. It was part of a note. I knew the handwriting—Oliver Waldon's—and the date showed that it had been written that same day; it was an answer to her note of yesterday, I conjectured at once.

For the reader's benefit I will give it in full; the portion in italics is that which I read,

"Nov. 10th, 18—"

"DEAR MRS. INGRAM:

Your note has given me new life. For the past weeks I have been most wretched; but for you, on whose aid I have relied, I could not have borne the lot that has so unexpectedly fallen to me. I will meet you as Beatrice has requested. Why will she not see me alone? I shall be on hand promptly—at the right of your grounds. I scarcely dare to hope that she will put her trust in me; yet my prayer is that we may meet to-night to part no more—for your sake as well as mine.

Yours truly,

"O. W."

CHAPTER X.

CRUEL AS THE GRAVE.

I CRUSHED that bit of paper in my hand as fiercely as if it had been the object on which I longed to wreak my vengeance. There it was, in black and white—and how doubly false it proved my wife to be!—false to me, and false to her own word!

Had she not said to me, in all solemnity: "I am true to you in thought and in deed." And what an undeniable contradiction was this!

"Oh, misery—misery!" I moaned in my anguish.

Then anger gained sway, and I cried out:

"Why should I grieve? I know now that my idol is marred—let me accept the bitter truth bravely, and bear it manfully. I have been wilfully blind thus far; but now, that my eyes have been forced open, I cannot refuse to see and believe. So ends my dream of happiness! I have at last awakened to the painful, unlovely reality."

I bowed my head upon my hand, and read over that bit again.

"I will meet you," it says. When, I wonder? To-night, I suppose—but Ettie will settle that for me. 'Of your grounds,' this bit says. At the right or the left, I wonder? But that will not be difficult to ascertain; and I will ascertain!—when Ettie goes to meet Oliver Waldon, her husband will not be far behind!"

I pondered over that bit for hours.

It seemed like staring my misery right in the face; I wished to become accustomed to it, so that it could have no power to overcome me, and cause me to betray myself at any time.

For the first time since my illness Ettie remained away from me; it was a great relief, for in her presence I should have felt restrained while trying to conceal my cognizance of this last, best proof of her falsity. I had no fear that the meeting would take place till evening, since, as it was to be held in my grounds, they would wait for darkness, of course.

Evening came, and so did Ettie.

The friendly dusk hid our faces from each other, and neither knew how they contradicted the suave, bland tones in which we spoke.

I was all expectation, waiting to hear her say that she must leave me.

I almost chuckled with satisfaction when she did say, timidly:

"I will send Aunt Phoebe to you for a while, Allan. You do not care for my company, and you cannot wish to be alone all the evening."

"Do you intend to remain away *all* the evening?" I asked, meaningly.

"Away!" she exclaimed, in alarm. "I did not say anything about going away."

"No, I know you did not, my dear; but I imagined that you were, you know."

She looked at me anxiously.

I returned her gaze calmly, saying, with an icy smile:

"Go, my love, go; I can spare you. And don't trouble yourself about Aunt Phoebe; I prefer to be alone."

She stood, hesitating, for a moment—turned as if to go, then turned back to me, saying, timidly, as she half-extended her hands:

"Oh, Allan, why are you so strange? What has made you change? I have been so happy, and now—oh, I am so miserable! Must it be like this always?"

"I'm afraid so, my love," I said, with freezing coldness.

I felt my stern resolutions giving away as I saw her so lovely—so sad—and heard her pleading; but I fortified myself by whispering, "duplicity," and I was as frigid as an iceberg.

"Oh, Allan," she cried, piteously and tremulously, "do you not love me?"

With the remembrance of that bit of paper in my mind, that question seemed like the hight of all hypocrisy.

"Consummate actress!" I muttered.

She heard it. I saw the vivid red leap up into her face, and the flame of indignation flash from her eyes; turning from me, she cried angrily, scornfully:

"What a fool I am to stand here and plead to you! What a fool I am to expect that you should have any feeling! You can be kind and tender—but it's a great effort, I suppose, for it never lasted. It is natural for you to be ugly, and ill-tempered—yes, and cruel! I have tried to bear with your whims and your oddities, but I shall try no longer."

"I can forgive you for your words, my love," I said, mildly, "when I think of your youth. I ought to pity you, poor child; you know no better, being inexperienced, unused to the world, and so young."

"And I can forgive you for your words," she retorted, "when I think of your age. I ought to pity you, poor man, you cannot act differently, being crabbed, tired of the world, and so old."

"Thank you. It is quite refreshing to have one's qualities recapitulated like that."

"I have said very little of what is in my heart," she returned, meaningly, and looking keenly at me. "When love is there, I can—I force myself to forget the rest; but, as now, when you are so unjust, so unkind that love vanished, then I think of it all, and I—I shudder as I near you! I long to go away, and never—never see you again! Did you say you felt better this evening, Allan?"

At first I did not comprehend; but a look toward the door warned me of the approach of Aunt Phoebe. Even now, bitter as I was, I still desired to hide the knowledge of our unhappiness from every one.

"Yes, my love, I feel quite strong; in fact, quite able to walk."

"But you must not, dear; you must be very—very careful."

"I think, however, my love, that I *will* walk a little—just a little, my dear—a turn about the grounds, say."

"What! Oh, that would be very imprudent, dear."

I chuckled inwardly as I saw her evident dismay.

"Oh, Aunt Phoebe," she continued, as that personage tripped into the room, "Allan talks of going out, and he must not. Will you not remain with him for a while?"

"I should admire to, Et—but my tooth. I've got a tooth—a toothache, I mean, and I've just been a-getting of some stuff for it, and I'm a-going to be a-taking of it, and see if I can't sleep. Ain't had no nap to-day, and I feel streaked, and weakly like. I should admire to, Allan, but a tooth's a tooth, you know—"

"Yes, I know, Aunt Phoebe; and it is just as well. Ettie is determined that I shall *not* go, and I am determined that I *shall* go into the grounds for a little turn."

"Do tell! So you've been a-having of a *little* quarrel, eh?" she said, shyly.

"Just a very little one," we echoed.

"In a sort of a playful way, you know," I added.

"I want to know! Just like two kittens, eh? *How* beautiful!"

I fancied that she laughed mockingly as she tripped from the room.

The sunlight of her presence gone, we became icicles again.

Saying tartly: "I hope you'll enjoy your walk, Allan," Ettie turned to leave.

"I thank you. Why don't you add that you hope I'll meet no one in my perambulations?"

Again she looked dismayed; but, without a word, she hurried from the room.

"Now is the time," I said, rising and testing my strength. "Yes, I can walk; not very briskly, but still I can walk. Let me see, what month is it? November—yes; well, I'll need a hat, I suppose. This dressing-gown is not just the thing for a promenade, but it will have to do with the addition of a shawl, or something."

I fear I presented rather an odd appearance as I sallied forth; slipped feet, long dressing-gown of

black cashmere with scarlet facings, a heavy grey shawl about my shoulders, and a large slouched hat upon my head.

I passed along the hall till I came to the room occupied by Aunt Phoebe. The door was ajar, and the gas was burning. I saw Ettie's charming relative reclining upon her bed. Something in her appearance seemed to me peculiar; I looked, and looked again, and then I discovered what it was; she was shorn of her cap and curls, and her few grey hairs were scarcely perceptible.

Instantly, a suspicion darted into my mind; it was one similar to that which had come to me on that day of my accident. I had not credited then the explanation Ettie had given about Aunt Phoebe's somnambulism; I believed that Ettie herself had appeared to me, and I believed now that she could account for the missing cap and curls.

"Aunt Phoebe's toothache has served her well," I muttered. "She thinks to deceive me again should I happen to meet her in the grounds. But she should have closed this door; knowing that Aunt Phoebe lies here asleep, I cannot expect to meet her elsewhere. You will not succeed this time, my Ettie."

I was rather elated with my discovery. I walked briskly on, forgetting my weakness. I made my exit from the house, descended to the grounds, and hurried over to the left, along which side the lane extended. I walked the entire length, but the rendezvous was not there.

"At the other side, I suppose," I said, sighing, for I was beginning to feel quite exhausted. I had now to force myself along, and I despaired of reaching the spot in time.

While I was slowly making my way across the grounds, the interview between Oliver, Beatrice, and Ettie, was transpiring. I will recount it here, so that the reader may understand what followed. Of course, my knowledge of the meeting was gained at a later date.

In the shadow of the pines and hemlocks Oliver Waldon stood, a tall, dark figure in the dim moonlight, his gleaming eyes just visible beneath his broad-brimmed hat.

The sound of hurried footsteps fell upon his ear, and he started forward with a low, glad exclamation. Eagerness was expressed in his attitude as he paused upon beholding the two approaching forms—Beatrice and Ettie, the latter without Aunt Phoebe's cap and curls.

"Beatrice," began Oliver, extending his hands.

"Stand back, sir," was the cold interruption.

"My God," he moaned, raising his hand to his head. "Unrelenting still! And I have hoped so that this meeting would end in reconciliation."

"Never! there can never be reconciliation between us."

"And you still persist in believing rumor, the inventions of gossips, the—"

"We will not discuss that, Oliver Waldon. I sent for you that we might fully understand each other. I have enough to endure without being troubled by your importunities for a return to my favor. I have told you that I wished neither to see you, nor hear from you; still you have written to me again and again."

"Not a word," as he essayed to interrupt. "Let me speak, or I will leave at once. You think me cruel—unnatural; and I am neither. But I am proud—very proud—and I abhor wrong. To love, I must respect. For a long time I have shunned you, though I loved you; I felt that you were not true; that what report whispered of you was so. In an evil hour I listened to the dictates of my heart, and slighted the warning of reason. You were in trouble—it involved some one dear to Ettie—money was needed to extricate you both; I saw Ettie suffering; I thought of you as suffering; I could give the needed relief, and I sent Ettie to offer it to you. I did more; so foolish was I—so did the love in my heart conquer every consideration—that I not only believed all that Ettie had to say of your goodness, but I invested you with every virtue; I felt that you would not accept money from a woman who was nothing to you, so I also sent you an answer to your oft-repeated proposal of marriage. I became your wife—I gave myself to you; but even then my doubts would not entirely leave me. I bound you both to secrecy, so that in case my fears proved true, my folly would not be published to the world. My fears have come to pass. I will not release you from your vows, for I hold you two responsible for the wretched fate that has befallen me."

"Am I cruel? If you suffer, do I not suffer more? is not my life wrecked? It is; but the world shall never know it! I could not live if it did! Break your vows, and you will be answerable for a life! I could pierce my own heart, and face an outraged God, rather than face the world made merry over my folly! I shall make any and every sacrifice to hide my misery! The world shall not even have the opportunity to surmise that I am unhappy. And now, Oliver Waldon, listen closely; I am not legally your wife—"

"Again I beg of you, do not interrupt. I say I am not legally your wife. I am not of age, and the ceremony was performed without the consent of my guardian. Such a union can be annulled, and it must be—"

"Beatrice!"

Only that one word, but it told of the man's agony. Unheeding, she went on:

"It can be annulled as secretly as it was made. Then I shall be free to give my hand and fortune to another and I can live a lie successfully before the world. This must be done at once; it will force me to see you again, and that is for the last time. That is all. Come, Ettie, we will go."

"Is this your unalterable decision, Beatrice?"

"It is."

He bowed proudly; he would plead no more.

A long, weary sigh came from Ettie's lips. Beatrice said, harshly, quickly:

"I cannot pity you, Ettie. I have pity only for myself."

They departed hurriedly, as they had come, and Oliver stood alone in the shadow of the pines and the hemlocks.

"If I could only hate her!" he moaned. "But I cannot! How can she be so severe—so cruel? I came here full of hope; I depart broken-hearted."

He turned to go, but a hand was placed upon his arm.

He looked around quickly, and met the gaze of a pair of glittering eyes. The owner threw back the shawl that covered her head, and then he made out a small, wrinkled face, about which hung short, cork-screw curls. Before he could say a word, a shrill voice piped:

"Have you ever heard of Aunt Phoebe?"

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE DARKNESS.

Just as I had feared—I did not reach the spot in time.

It had been my idea to confront them while together; I had contemplated Ettie's dismay with a savage sort of satisfaction, and I had rehearsed the burning, scathing words I longed to hurl at Oliver Waldon, but I did not reach the spot in time.

As I reached the place of rendezvous, I could just make out the outlines of two figures in the dim moonlight; I saw her hand upon his arm, her face lifted to his. Then they parted; he walked quickly away, and she turned toward the house.

A loud exclamation escaped me as I saw that my suspicion was correct—Ettie was in disguise. I could see the cap and curls which usually adorned Aunt Phoebe's head, and I made out the primitive attire so different from Ettie's long, flowing robes. Ah! she had feared that I would meet her, and thus she hoped to evade me. But, no—no, not this time, my Ettie! once before you succeeded, but never again.

She evidently heard my ejaculation, for she paused, looked quickly around, and drew her shawl well over her head and face. As she started on again I stepped forward, and placed my hand upon her shoulder.

With a low, frightened cry she looked up at me. I could just see two glittering eyes peering out from the folds of the shawl. Then she averted her face and tried to release herself from my grasp, as she said—and her imitation of Aunt Phoebe's voice was so good that for a moment I was staggered:

"Oh, it's you, Allan, be it? My sakes! if I wasn't skeered for just about a second. What be *you* here for?"

"It won't do, Ettie," I said, sternly. "You have deceived me once, but you cannot succeed again. You might just as well cease trying to screen yourself under cover of your most respected relative; I know you, in spite of your disguise."

"My sakes! hear the man! Allan, you're worse. You feel queer about the head, don't you? You ain't quite sure of what you are a-doing, be you?"

"On the contrary, I am *so* sure of what I am about that, with all your perfect imitation, I am not to be befooled. For heaven's sake, Ettie, don't anger me more! How can you persist in continuing the *role* of Aunt Phoebe, when you know that I have penetrated your disguise?"

"You ain't done nothing of the sort! Allan, you ain't been a-drinking, now, have you?"

Had I not been so inflamed with anger, I should certainly have laughed at the deep solemnity of her tone as she asked that question; as it was, I gave vent to a loud, impatient exclamation.

She hastened to add:

"You are acting very queer, Allan, a-coming out here in the night a-looking like a figger in a show, a-prowling around and a-meeting of your wife's own aunt, and a-telling of her that she ain't herself at all. Look ye here, if you ain't drunk, I'd like you to tell me this, straightforward: If I ain't Aunt Phoebe, who am I?"

"Heavens, woman, you'll drive me mad. I tell you you *cannot*—with all your clever acting—you *cannot* deceive me. I know you, Ettie. Aunt Phoebe lies asleep on her bed, shorn of the cap and curls that are now upon your head. Is she ubiquitous? If she is there, how can she be here? And is Aunt Phoebe one to hold clandestine meetings with a young man? With my own eyes I saw you part from Oliver Waldon scarcely five minutes since. No—no, Ettie; you have failed this time—utterly."

"Then I ain't Aunt Phoebe?"

"No! I tell you, no! Why—*why* will you harp on that?"

"But I'm Ettie?"

"Yes—you know you are."

"No, I didn't know it. Thank ye for a-telling of it to me. Well, I'm Ettie—Aunt Phoebe is asleep on her bed; now, what comes next?"

"Woman—woman!" I thundered. "Have you no sense of shame in you? How can you treat this matter so lightly? Do you not care that I know you to be false? Is it nothing to you that I have gained positive proof of that which I have suspected, and you have denied?"

She did start at that. I heard a smothered exclamation beneath the shawl, which she still kept over her face; she placed one hand upon my arm, as she said, gravely:

"Allan, what have you been a-saying?"

In the fury into which I had lashed myself I noticed nothing; the hand that was upon my arm I

should have known was not Ettie's had I looked at it; but so convinced was I that my wife stood before me that never a doubt entered my mind. Agony and anger blinded me, and spurred me on.

I shook off her hand roughly, as I sneered: "Am I to be treated to another of your solemn denials? Is your intention to tell me now that what I have seen was an illusion? It would not astonish me to hear you say that you have not seen Oliver Waldon—that you had no intention of seeing him, in fact—"

"And neither had I—"

"What—what—what! You deny that your meeting with him was pre-arranged? It was an accident, I suppose. You happened to be out here strolling—strolling on a dark November night—a very likely thing, indeed; he happened to be strolling, also, in the grounds of a house he has been requested not to enter; you happened to meet! All accident, eh! was it not?"

I was gnashing my teeth by this time.

"My sakes; what a bear!"

"You are trying to evade the answer to my question," I cried. "But evasion or denial will not help you now. I know you have seen Oliver Waldon, for I saw you part from him, and I know that the meeting was pre-arranged, for here is proof," and I fumbled about till I succeeded in extricating that bit of paper from my vest pocket. "Here is proof!" and I flaunted it in her face.

"That—what's that?" she asked, eagerly; and I fancied, anxiously.

"That—what's that?" I echoed, tauntingly. "It is part of the note you received, in answer to one you wrote yesterday. And it is *this* that gave me a desire to take a turn in the grounds this evening! With this before you, can you still deny?"

"What's in it? what can there be in a bit like that to upset you so?"

"What is in it? Every word tells, madame—every word—every single word!"

"Well, now, what do they tell?"

"Ah, you hope to escape me yet, madame! You think that you can explain away the very significant words here written! But you cannot—you cannot, madame! I hold the trump-card now, right here in my hand, though you think to convince me that it is only a seven-spot. This bit—this little bit—tells all that I have suspected."

"Do tell! I want to know!"

"Oh, was there ever such an aggravating woman! Ettie—Ettie, have you lost all regard for yourself—all regard for me? Can you not, at least, treat this matter with becoming sobriety? It is like death to me; is it nothing to you?"

"Now, Allan, look ye here. There mayn't be as much in that bit as you think for, and there mayn't be as much in that meeting as you think for."

"Then explain it—explain it. But you cannot. You cannot give me a good reason for meeting Oliver Waldon here; neither can you explain this note, over which I have pored till the words seem to be seared into my brain. They tell me all—from acknowledging the reception of the note you wrote yesterday, to the mention of a time when you shall 'part no more.' 'Trust in me,' he says. Ay, *trust* in him—the miscreant—and you will find that you have been leaning on a reed! There, take it, and read for yourself what I have seen."

She fairly snatched it from me.

I fancied I heard a smothered sob.

When she spoke again, her voice was husky and tremulous:

"How is it a-going to end, Allan?"

"God only knows! I love you, Ettie, and I can forgive all but this continued hypocrisy. I can bear much, but this—this is too much!"

"Why don't you try to find out the truth, Allan? There is something here that you don't understand."

"Then, in Heaven's name, explain it! You have said that you *can*; then why are you silent? On, it is misery—misery! living at odds all the time, trying to keep up appearances before your charming aunt, (who could not have chosen a more inopportune time for her visit, and whom I heartily wish was on Mt. Pisgah, or some other lofty height, so that I were safe from her keen eyes, and her mocking cackle) loving you, yet hating you for your duplicity; and, too, knowing that you—my wife—the woman for whom I am enduring all these tortures, believes me guilty of a crime!"

An eager start, and an eager exclamation of:

"What a crime?"

I did not stop to think that I was speaking of that which I had vowed never to mention to Ettie; the flame of indignation burning within me spurred me on to proclaim all my grievances.

"Yes; and the most hideous of crimes—murder!"

A stifled shriek from the woman before me.

"It is a dread word—few can hear it unmoved. My knowledge of the deed has seemed to you like proof of my guilt, because you were too willing to believe I met him, as I told you—met him, and spoke to him, and threatened him, too; he did not declare himself, but he assured me that he would not meet you. I did not know that it was your brother Herbert, till the next morning. I followed you as you went down to the river, and I saw and heard all. Your brother's dead face, as you lifted it out of the water—"

A succession of short, terrified shrieks had interlarded my words; at that last one, one loud, long cry rang out on the stillness; throwing her arms up with a gesture of agony, she turned and fled from me, so suddenly that I could not have stayed her had I been so inclined.

I stood, wondering what this meant. Did it startle her so to hear mention made of her brother's death?

She had borne it so quietly hitherto, that this unexpected outbreak quite amazed me.

"Does she believe me?" I asked myself. "Will she still think me guilty?"

A sudden remembrance of my wrongs flashed over me then, and I added, angrily:

"What matters it now? Let her think what she will. I have, at last, openly accused her of falsity; now I will wait upon Oliver Waldon, and demand satisfaction of him."

Fired with this determination, I strode fiercely toward the house. As I stepped into the hall, I saw Ettie just about to ascend the staircase—Ettie, in her own attire, and devoid of the cap and curls that so transfigured her.

I looked, as I felt, astonished. How had she succeeded in effecting this change in so short a time?

She looked at me, and—*laughed*—actually *laughed*! Think of it! After the interview we had just had—after I had accused her of falsity—after the cry of agony with which she had left me, she stood before me, in the full glare of the gaslight, without a sign of conscious shame upon her face, and *laughed*!

Oh, how my ire was aroused! She saw that, and she laughed the louder.

"Will you stop!" I cried, at last, in a tone choked with rage.

"Yes, certainly. Quite an unique costume, Allan, and very becoming; it is one that you don when taking a turn in the grounds on a November night, I suppose. Did you enjoy your walk, dear?"

I could not understand the satisfaction so apparent in her tone.

"You were disappointed, I fear," she added.

I understood the drift of her words. How, *how* could she speak like that when I had parted from her only ten minutes since? Was she now about to tell me that she had not met me? Was she about to deny that, too?

I could not speak; if I had, it would have been an explosion of wrath—I remembered Aunt Phoebe, and was silent.

I cast one glance at Ettie—a glance that was meant to be withering—as I passed her on the staircase. In going through the hall, I again halted at Aunt Phoebe's door; this time, I was attracted by the sound of moaning and groaning from within.

CHAPTER XII.

AN OVERWHELMING DISCOVERY.

ETTIE, who had followed me, also halted at Aunt Phoebe's room as she heard the moaning and groaning; then knocking, she opened the door, and entered.

I saw her charming relative pacing wildly up and down the floor, now wringing her hands, now raising them to her head, on which were the cap and curls which my wife had borrowed.

"Ettie returned them in time," I muttered, then my attention was attracted by the rather incoherent explanation Aunt Phoebe was giving as to the cause of her distress:

"Oh, it's my Herbert—I mean, my tooth! It's killed!—no—no, I mean, it's a-aching so that it's most a-killing of me! Oh, yes—yes, I've been asleep, and I've been a-dreaming of my tooth—I mean my Herbert. I thought he was a-aching—no—no; I mean, I thought it was killed! Oh—oh—oh! dear—dear—dear! It's awful! dreadful! What would your ma say if she knew that my tooth was—that my Herbert, I mean, was a-aching so? And you knew it, Et—you knew that my Herbert—no—no, my tooth, was killed! Oh—oh, I don't know what I'm a saying! I've been a dreaming of my tooth, and a suffering with my Herbert—no—no, that ain't the way at all! I've got it all so mixed up that I don't know which is my Herbert, and which is my tooth!"

I saw that Ettie's face was white and full of dread, as she turned to pacify her excited aunt; then I hurried away, filled with doubts—terrible doubts.

I went to that arm-chair before the fire, heartily wishing that I had not left it for a turn in the grounds; I seated myself, and tried to reason my doubts away.

Had Aunt Phoebe been dreaming of Herbert? If so, did it not give credence to Ettie's explanation of her aunt's somnambulist propensities? If it had not been Ettie, but Aunt Phoebe, who had appeared to me that day in the drawing-room, might it not have been Aunt Phoebe to-night, instead of Ettie?

"Pshaw!" I cried, impatiently. "That is nonsense—sheer nonsense! Of course it was Ettie. Would Aunt Phoebe go to meet Oliver Waldon? No, certainly not. Of course it was Ettie."

I expressed myself thus positively on that point, still I felt very uneasy—very uncomfortable. I could not sit still; I arose and paced restlessly from room to room. Happening to glance at Ettie's escritoire, that piece of blotting-paper caught my eye.

"Ah, yes—Oliver's address! I shall wait upon him to-morrow, if this day's episodes have not exhausted me entirely."

I took up the paper, and held it to the light; then I heard Ettie's voice beside me:

"Why are you looking at that?"

"Do you know whose address is here to be found?" I asked.

"I do."

"Well, to speak plainly, I intend to call upon that gentleman at my first opportunity."

"Oh, Allan!" and her face was full of fear.

"Oh, Ettie!" I mocked.

"Do not go," she pleaded.

"And why not, my love?"

"Oh, there will be trouble if you do! you are so headstrong, and he cannot explain."

"I am sorry to grieve you, my dear, but I intend to go."

"Well, go then!" she snapped. "There is no use in trying to restrain you. Go, and let it end as it will. Perhaps it will be for the best," I heard her murmur, as she turned away from me.

"Has the aunt subsided?" I asked.

"Yes."

"She has strange dreams," I said, meaningly.

Ettie kept her face averted; I saw her hands flutter nervously, and her voice was husky and hurried as she made answer:

"Yes—yes, very strange. Oh, I hope—I hope she does not know the truth!"

"How could she?"

"To be sure, how could she? Good-night, Allan—good-night!"

And without looking at me she hastened away, her parting words ringing through the room like a cry of agony.

Another day came to hand, and I started out to wait upon Oliver Waldon.

All my doubts of the previous evening had been dispelled, for Aunt Phoebe had appeared at breakfast as bright and smiling as ever, and had met my gaze with perfect equanimity; so I went along satisfied that all was as clear as the day.

On one point I was slightly troubled; why had I acquainted Ettie with my intention of waiting upon Oliver Waldon? She would, in all probability, send to warn him, and he would endeavor to avoid me.

I determined to outwit them. I left the house in the forenoon, and I would not go to his office till dusk; if he had been absent all through the day, he would probably return toward evening, when, owing to my recent illness, it would not be expected that I would be abroad. Toward evening I made my way to his office—he pretended to be a lawyer; I think his first client had yet to come.

I reached the building, and ascended to rooms 12 and 13, going over in my mind, for the last time, the scathing sentences I had prepared. I would open the door and enter; he would start up, and upon seeing me, would sink crestfallen into his chair; then I would hurl upon him the torrent of my wrath, beneath which he would writhe and groan.

I had roused myself to such an enthusiastic pitch with my programme, that I was burning with impatience to begin. I reached the door of room No. 12, and opened it. Yes, there by the table, he was seated—at least, a man was seated there; in my eagerness, I did not stop to look again. I stepped into the room, and in a loud voice, cried:

"Oliver Waldon—villain!—hypocrite!—turn and see the man you have wronged."

He *did* turn, quickly; but I, not he, sank crestfallen into a chair, for—it was not Oliver Waldon!

What had I done? Acquainted a stranger with the secret that I would hide from the world if at the cost of my life.

It was some time before I could muster up sufficient courage to enable me to look at this person again; when I did, I found him staring at me.

"Surely, his face is familiar," I thought.

I strained my eyes in the dusk, and stared at him; and the flash of recognition came simultaneously.

"My friend Ingram!"

"George Waldon, by all that's surprising!"

"Well!"

"Well!"

Then we shook hands heartily, and again vented our surprise by exclaiming:

"Well!"

"Rather a surprise, eh, Ingram?"

"Rather," I assented, in a tone full of chagrin.

"Well, you see, I have just arrived. No one knows of it; I didn't tell the boys, because—well, you see, I'm an old bachelor, and I suppose I'm odd, and I thought I'd like to come unannounced—see? I found Oliver's address—he was always my favorite, you know—and I came here. Doors were both locked, so I applied to the janitor, and he admitted me—see? Well, I've been waiting here since—since noon, and the scamp hasn't appeared yet. I hope he'll come soon."

Those words awakened me to a sense of my position. If he should come now, what would I do? I certainly would not attack him before a third party; and I felt that we could not meet without betraying that which I would keep secret. Of course, I must leave at once; and muttering something to that effect, I arose.

"Now, that's shabby, Ingram—positively shabby, to leave me alone on the first day of my return. And, besides," his fine face became clouded as he added:

"I want to talk to you about Oliver. You're likely to know—the words that you uttered just now tell me that you can give me some information—see? I've heard from the boys now and then—Leonard's were all saintly epistles, Oliver's dashing and scampish—but you can't judge from letters, you know. I don't want to think that Oliver is— But, see here, friend Ingram; I found this upon the table—is it any indication of my nephew's character?"

I took the sheet of paper he passed to me, and read:

"UNCLE ISAACS:—The diamonds will have to go. I've clung to them long and well—family relics, you know; but if I cling longer, I'm lost! I'm in an uncommonly embarrassed position—the worst strait I've been in yet; if money is not forthcoming, *at once*, I shall be so bitterly humiliated, that life will be unbearable. You have helped me before, pray, help me again. Call as soon as possible, and oblige,

Yours, etc., O. W."

"Well, Ingram, what do you think of that?"

"I'll be frank with you, Waldon, and tell you that this is an indication of your nephew's character. He

is as wild, as graceless, as his brother is staid and respectable. I have given him up altogether; I have, in fact, forbidden him my house."

"And has he no good qualities that offset the bad?"

"Not one. No one speaks well of him—society condemns him; it is only that irresistible, fascinating way of his that prevented him from being shunned altogether."

"You have some special grudge against him, I imagine."

"No—that is, yes. He has—that is, I have. In fact, I'm in a great hurry, and I must go. Oliver will be here presently, and here is my card. I shall be very happy to see you at any time."

"Thank you. By the way, I have to congratulate you, Ingram—have I not? It seems to me the boys wrote that you had taken a wife—a young wife. Allow me—"

And I listened to his profuse pleasantries most impatiently.

Again I started for the door. A moan from the adjoining room—No. 13—brought me to a stand-still.

"Did you hear that, Ingram?"

"I did."

"Shall we reconnoiter? I fancied I heard some one enter that room after I came."

We quietly approached the door that connected the two rooms, and opened it. I looked in, and—great Heavens! over by the window sat some one in the unmistakable attire of Aunt Phoebe! Some one—who? Ettie, of course. She had come to warn Oliver, and had donned this disguise to screen herself from the gaze of the curious, and from me, if possible. I comprehended the situation at a glance; she had heard my voice, and it had alarmed her so that she was ready to faint.

Oh, what a dilemma was this! Here was Oliver's uncle—he had heard my words upon entering; if he discovered that that was Ettie, he would know the whole sad story. No—no, that must not be! I closed the door, quickly, sharply, scarcely knowing what I was saying.

"It's only an old man. We had better not disturb him."

"But he is ill. There, he is moaning again. Really, it is not right to—"

He had opened the door again, and he started back, adding:

"Why, it's a woman—not a man."

"Yes—yes—that's what I said, at least, it's what I meant. I wouldn't disturb her," as I tried to keep him back. "You see, she's old, and odd, and she might take offense."

"Yes, but she's faint. You wouldn't let an old lady suffer, would you?"

"Yes, I would—I mean in this instance. Better let her suffer than to deprive Oliver of a client—his only client, probably. She looks like one of these old, miserly creatures who keep their money stowed away in their stockings, and, you know, they take umbrage even at kindness. Indeed—indeed—I wouldn't disturb her."

He looked at me in amazement.

I knew that my manner must seem to him very strange, but it could not be helped. If I had to keep him back by main strength, he should not approach Ettie.

"She's gasping for breath," he said.

Yes, she was, and clutching feebly at her bonnet-strings.

Oh, could she not hear me, and try to help me in my endeavor to save her from this disclosure? Had she no regard for the situation in which she would be placed?

Uncle Waldon (as I shall call him) started forward. I caught his arm, whispering:

"Let me attend to her."

But he did not heed me. The body in the chair was swaying to and fro. He sprang to it, and caught it in his arms.

I saw him unfasten the bonnet-strings; I saw that by his awkward handling, the cap and curls would be displaced when the bonnet was removed; I had not the courage to wait and see more. I fled precipitately, caring not how my strange conduct would be construed, only hoping that Ettie would not declare herself.

But there was little consolation in that hope. Oliver would return, and that would expose all; or, if not that, Uncle Waldon, seeing her now, would recognize her, when I would have to present him to my wife.

Oh, misery—misery, why had I ever thought of going there! If I had not, all this would have been avoided. I vowed then that never again would I take a step toward bettering the condition of things in my household; for every time that I had interfered, I had only succeeded in making matters worse. I tried to stem the storm; but my attempts only added to its violence, and the thunderbolts all fell upon my head.

But this—this was the worst of all! Oh, the torture I endured as I made my way to my home, and thought of the scene from which I had fled! Surely now Ettie would feel disgraced. I imagined her as awaking from her swoon, and finding herself in a stranger's arms; and what might she not tell in those first few moments?

Blinded with my misery, I fairly rushed into my house, and started headlong for the library, where I could be alone, and could groan over this wretched state of affairs to my heart's content.

I was as if involved in darkness—there seemed to be a rushing, roaring torrent within and about me. I saw nothing as I started down the hall; I realized nothing till I heard a mild voice, saying:

"If you please, Allan, have a regard for consequences."

Those gentle tones caused me to recoil full three

feet. I stood there, horror-stricken, as I beheld—my wife!

"You!" I cried. "And Aunt Phoebe—where is she?"

"Out," was the laconic reply.

I bowed my head, and groaned—not because my wife was now before me, but because I knew that I had left Aunt Phoebe behind me. And oh! with what a rush of torturing doubts did that knowledge overwhelm me!

Without a word of explanation to Ettie, I hurried on to the library; and there, in solitude, I tried to realize the full measure of my bitter—bitter humiliation.

CHAPTER XIII.

"THEY SAY."

"FRIEND INGRAM:

"Kindly refrain from mentioning that I have returned from India. For certain reasons connected with my nephew, I desire to remain incog. for a time. The boys have not seen me for over twenty years—no one knows of my arrival but you; so, if you will do as I have requested, I can accomplish my purpose readily. Should you meet me in the presence of any one, pray don't recognize me."

"Yours truly,

"(GEORGE WALDON.)"

That note was brought to me in the midst of my painful cogitations. It lifted part of the load from off my mind. I should be spared the embarrassment that an explanation of my strange behavior would cause. Very willingly I granted his request, and then I turned my thoughts from Aunt Phoebe.

He had evidently not declared himself to her, as he said in his note:

"No one knows of my arrival but you."

It was not likely that she would have an opportunity of meeting him again, for of course he would not now come to my house, so no disclosure could come about in that way. It all depended upon the little woman herself.

I confess that when I thought of facing her my heart sank. First I resolved to go to her, and explain all; but I put that quickly from my mind. Never—never would I open my lips to any one in accusation of my wife! Then I resolved to brave it all as best I could, to let circumstances decide my future actions, and to deport myself as if all these mistakes had not occurred.

I dared not think of that meeting in the grounds. I hugged desperately the hope that it had been Ettie; I argued the matter over and over, concluding each time that it *must* have been Ettie. Several times I was on the point of sending for her and asking her, but my courage failed; I could better endure uncertainty than the confirmation of my fears.

I endured an hour of agonizing reflection, and then, nervening myself as if going to meet some dreaded fate, I repaired to the dining-room. I halted without the door, I opened it timidly, I entered with a sinking heart; like a whipped schoolboy, I made my obeisance to the ladies, and took immediate refuge behind the evening paper.

Never before had I been so interested; I read fiercely—that is the only way in which I can express it. I felt like one doomed to death seated in the shadow of the gallows; I felt that when I looked up from those columns, I might hear from Aunt Phoebe, and what then—what then?

"Allan, my dear, we are waiting for you."

Ettie's calm voice aroused me. I laid down the paper with a sigh, feeling as if I were parting with a friend, and took my place at the table. Never before had I been so engrossed with the viands upon my plate; I ate as if I were never to eat again, looking up not once till dinner was over.

Aunt Phoebe's silence augured ill to me; it seemed as if she were nursing her wrath that the outburst would be the more furious. I glanced at her quickly, fearfully, as I arose from the table, to see what indications there were upon her face; I glanced at her and met her gaze—and I could have fallen right down and worshipped her, for not a sign was there that anything out of the ordinary had occurred—not the least consciousness was there in her gaze.

Oh, what a relief—what an unexpected relief! Perhaps she had not heard a word of what I had said; being faint, how could she? Or, what seemed more likely to me, perhaps it had not been she at all; in the dusk that had prevailed the room, how easily I could have made a mistake; it might really have been some old, odd client of Oliver's, after all.

I expanded into good humor at once; the gratitude in my heart obliterated all bitterness, all anger, and for a time peace and pleasantness reigned in the household.

Ettie looked at me in surprise as I talked and laughed, and played upon the guitar, (an accomplishment in which I was proficient); perhaps she thought I was not quite rational—that undue exertion after my illness had unsettled my mind. But as my good-humor promised to last well through the evening, the surprise vanished, and a glad look came instead.

When Aunt Phoebe tripped away to bed, and Beatrice left in her staid, stately way, Ettie seated herself by me, slipped her hand into mine, and whispered:

"Oh, Allan, you are like yourself to-night, and it makes me very—very happy."

Now that jealousy and distrust were set aside, I could realize how well I loved my wife. I stooped and kissed her, murmuring fondly:

"My darling."

She nestled closer to me; after a short, blissful silence, I took up my guitar, and to a low, soft accompaniment, sang one of the songs that had been her delight in the days of our courtship. It brought back that happy time to our minds; and when I had

finished, we talked it all over, finding much joy in calling up happy scenes, and happy moments.

It was an hour of sweet communion, a bright—bright spot in our clouded lives. With the hope that it might last so earnest in my heart that I could not express it, I said:

"We'll let bygones be bygones, darling; we'll begin anew, and try to be happy always."

To my surprise, as well as to my sorrow, Ettie released herself from my embrace, and arose, sighing wearily.

A breath of the old irritation passed over my heart, ruffling the happiness that was there.

"What now?" I asked, trying hard to speak gently.

"Why could you not have allowed this to last a little longer? I'm foolish enough to be happy when you are kind and tender; but you always dispel it."

"If I have done? It is *you*, it seems to me."

"Oh, it is not, Allan—it is *you*! Was I not sitting by you as contented as possible—"

"Yes; and didn't you, suddenly and without cause, get up and sigh as if you were the most injured of women?"

"And as I am! I am continually subjected to your insinuations—your ungenerous suspicions—"

"Now—now, Ettie, my love, pause—pause and reflect. Don't call up needless discussion. Do try to have a little control over your temper. I'm willing to forget everything, and—"

"That's just it, Allan Ingram. I *will* not endure your tolerance. How magnanimous you are! 'Willing to forget everything,' indeed! What is there for you to forget? You talk as if you were some saint, willing to bear with me and my sins. With the consciousness of innocence in my heart, it galls—it humiliates—it *angers* me to hear insinuations. And we can never be happy—never, till you cease uttering them!"

I arose then, also sighing wearily.

"You judge yourself too leniently, my love," I said. "What you would consider grave faults in others, you regard as nothing in yourself. It is really amazing that you can face me and complain because I doubt you—"

"And it is more than amazing that you can face me and insinuate as you do, when you yourself are not above reproach."

I understood that she referred to Herbert. That made my blood boil. I caught her arm, saying:

"Then you don't believe—"

"Why should I believe what you say in your defense, when you will not believe that which I say in mine?"

"Bahl!" I cried, angrily, dropping her arm quickly.

"A wife who will suspect her own husband—"

"Is no worse than a husband who will suspect his own wife!" she interrupted.

"But you have no proof, Ettie."

"Neither have you any proof."

"And you wrong me so."

"Do you ever think how you wrong me?"

"What I've seen I must believe."

"And what I've heard I must believe."

"Answer me this, Ettie," I said, sternly: "Do you believe me guilty?"

"Oh, no—no, Allan. If I did, how could I remain here? Oh, I don't believe—I only suspect—and fear."

"That you should even suspect is doing me foul injustice—"

"And what of your suspicions of me?"

"Oh, can you not comprehend that there is a wide difference in our cases. You are the most unreasonable of your sex."

"And you are the most jealous, suspicious, disagreeable of yours. There, you have my opinion of you, so good night."

She turned in her quick, petulant way, and left me to my gloomy thoughts.

They were interrupted as I caught sight of an invitation lying opened upon the table—another dinner at Bostwick's, and of course we would have to go, for while our presence might not be noted, our absence surely would. Again I should have to wear the mask of a smiling face, while my heart was full of bitterness and grief. Oh, this endeavor to keep up appearances was the hardest part of all to bear!

I broached the matter to Ettie on the following day, and was surprised to meet with no opposition. I had expected that she would refuse to go to the Bostwick's; on the contrary, she seemed eager to go.

This time Aunt Phoebe was included in the invitation. I will confess that in secret I hoped she would not accompany us; but when she announced her intention of going, I smiled and looked as pleased as was possible.

Ettie, attired in a robe of chocolate-colored silk, elaborately trimmed with bands of brown embossed velvet, artificial acorns adorning her wavy hair; Beatrice, stately and severe in her heavy black silk, jet bands on her amber hair; Aunt Phoebe in her glossy silk gown, her white lace cap and corkscrew curls, entered Mrs. Bostwick's parlors with me. One, or some, or all of us, created quite a sensation among the assembled company, there was a stir, a buzz, and all eyes were directed toward us.

I felt that "the world" had been busy during our temporary absence—it will be remembered that Ettie and I had not been "out" together since the masquerade at Marian Stewart's.

A very pretty picture those parlors made, tastily, luxuriously furnished, and filled with elegantly attired guests. There was the glitter of lights, the sparkle of bright eyes, smiling faces and merry laughter; a pretty picture, yet beneath the surface what hideous depths of "hatred, envy, malice, and all uncharitableness" was there.

Dinner was over, and I had retired to the solitude of the conservatory to muse over several things that I had noticed; first, there was the meeting between

Ettie and our host's son—Harry Bostwick. (A weak, unsuited man, tolerated in society only for his parent's sake). Ettie had been unusually calm and pale, while he had been flushed and agitated; then there was the meeting between Beatrice and Leonard Waldon; she had been uncommonly gracious, and he apparently well pleased; then there was the meeting between Leonard and Harry Bostwick; the former had been curt and impatient, it seemed to me, while the latter had been sullen and moody. And around about them all the figure of Aunt Phoebe had hovered.

"Indulging her curiosity," I thought, to myself.

I was aroused from my reverie by hearing the swish of silks, and the murmur of soft voices in close proximity to me.

"Oh, you have heard, I suppose."

I knew Marian Stewart's voice. I looked out between the large leaves of the plant behind which I was seated, and saw a group of ladies and gentlemen, all eagerly eying the central figure—Marian.

"About Mrs. Ingram? Oh, yes," chorused several voices.

"Then it was really she who came here in disguise."

"Oh, yes. What a shameful proceeding! Just look at her now—what an innocent face she wears! I wonder if she doesn't know that we know of her coming here?"

"Undoubtedly. You should have seen her as I gave her her handkerchief; it was found here, you know."

"It's the strangest piece of business, to be sure! What could have been her object?"

"Oh, that's plain enough; husband, rich and rather old; wife, young and gay and—well, you can't exactly call her a rustic, but she was a country girl you know, and was not as clever as she might be in carrying on her amours."

"Then you believe she's in love with Harry Bostwick?"

"Oh, I know that she is—"

"You're in the wrong, I assure you," interrupted Marian's legato voice. "It's not Harry Bostwick; it is Oliver Waldon."

"But I have it from good authority—"

"And I have it from better."

"I heard my story from our cook, who is first cousin to the cook at Miss Elwood's, who is sister to the chambermaid here; and she saw Mrs. Ingram, in her disguise, of course, talking to Harry Bostwick time and again."

"And I heard mine from our coachman, who is brother-in-law to the sister of Peter, Mr. Ingram's porter. He says that Oliver Waldon has been forbidden the house, and he ought to know, for he's right there. But have you heard the latest?"

"About the quarrel in Oliver Waldon's office? Oh, yes; I heard that last night from Miss Elwood."

"And Miss Elwood heard it from me. She promised not to repeat it."

"Oh, well, I promised her that I wouldn't mention it to any one. It is a shame to repeat it, for a duel now-a-days is a serious affair."

"A duel—a duel!"

"Yes; when I say duel I mean a quarrel, politely mentioned. You wouldn't think it of him—now would you?"

"Of him?—whom do you mean?"

"Why, Mr. Ingram, of course. That's why he is here to-night. He hasn't been out for some time, you know—they've said that he was ill, but that may be so, and it may not; he has come here to-night for appearance' sake."

"But the duel—the duel! What of it? When did it occur?"

"Two days ago."

"Where?"

"In Oliver Waldon's office."

"How did you hear of it?"

"I didn't hear of it; I was an eye witness—"

"To the duel?"

"Oh, no—mercy no, but to the rest."

"You met Mr. Ingram rushing like a madman from the office—so Miss Elwood told me."

"Yes, I met him; or rather, he passed me by, almost knocking me over in his mad haste."

"And then you saw her—"

"Whom—whom?"

"Why, Mrs. Ingram, of course! and in the most outrageous disguise. Poor thing, she had fainted with fright, I suppose. She was led down to the carriage by a gentleman—one of the seconds, I presume."

"She had gone there to prevent the duel, I suppose?"

"Undoubtedly."

"But how did you know it was she?"

"Oh, I knew it; besides, our porter is brother to one of the drivers in Brown's livery stable, and he drove her home that day—right to the door."

"What a disgraceful affair! Poor Mr. Ingram—how I pity him."

"Poor Oliver, I say. I met him on the street today, and he looked so pale and sad."

"Wounded, do you think?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Did he tell you anything about it?"

"No; and of course I wouldn't ask. I'm not inquisitive, you know."

"But I thought Oliver Waldon had gone to Europe."

"Oh, that was only a ruse. He wished to avoid a certain party—he told me so in confidence. Now if you'll promise never to repeat it, I'll tell you who it is," and Marian Stewart looked earnestly around on the dozen faces about her.

"Oh, never—never!"

"Well, it is Mrs. Ingram. He told me that at our masquerade. She evidently would not be avoided,

as this duel proves. Poor fellow! I hope his wound is not dangerous."

Her voice was drowned there by a rustling on the opposite side of the plant that screened me.

Then I heard Aunt Phoebe speaking, in subdued tones:

"Curus flower this, eh? I've been a-studying of the leaves—but that takes only my eyes; my ears has been a-hearing of the talk that's going on. It's about a young man, who's been a-wounding himself, dangerous, they say. Too bad, ain't it? There, hark ye! They're a saying of some more."

Marian's voice sounded out distinctly.

"He looked to me just like an animated corpse—hollow-eyed, his face white and drawn, his lips perfectly colorless. He could well be taken for the ghost of handsome Oliver Waldon. It's the wound, of course. I shouldn't be a bit surprised to hear of his death at any time."

Her last words were followed by a heavy thud, as of a falling body; it came from the opposite side of the plant.

I heard Aunt Phoebe exclaim:

"My sakes—here's a pretty mess!"

"It is Ettie," I said to myself, clenching my hands with my rage.

I peered through the leaves, and saw the form lying prostrate upon the floor.

My rage vanished, and with greatest alacrity I stepped from my hiding-place as I discovered that it was not Ettie, but Beatrice!

CHAPTER XIV.

MY NEXT MOVE.

It never occurred to me to connect Beatrice's fainting fit with the words Marian Stewart had uttered, for she, in my opinion, was the last person in the world to be interested in Oliver Waldon.

She was quickly restored to consciousness, and at once she endeavored to resume her self-possession, satisfying those about her with her explanation of temporary indisposition. She made no mention of the talk she had heard—neither did Aunt Phoebe; and of course I would not refer to it.

I noticed that Beatrice now turned coldly from Leonard when he approached and expressed his solicitude for that which had occurred; it was such a marked difference from her graciousness of the first part of the evening that it surprised me not a little. But I attributed it to her indisposition as I saw how pale she was, and with what effort she kept herself up.

"You are really ill, Beatrice," I said, going to her.

"Do you not wish to leave?"

"Oh, yes, Guardy, if you please," she half sobbed.

"I cannot remain here longer."

That was the nearest approach to emotion that I had ever seen in my stately ward. Had I not been so satisfied that she was suffering physically, I should surely have thought that severe mental disturbance was hers.

"Make yourself ready," I said, "while I go and gather together the rest of my flock."

With a cold, hurried courtesy to those about her she turned and left.

I looked around for Ettie. She was not in the parlors. My eyes rested upon Aunt Phoebe, and I blushed—yes, I actually blushed, for my wife's respected relative was seated in a corner near me, apparently holding communion with herself, and so earnestly shaking her head the while that her corkscrew curls bobbed about her face like little dancing imps. I blushed, till I saw that no one seemed to be taking any notice of her; then I recovered my equanimity, and hastened to her.

"We are going," I said, abruptly.

"That's the talk—that's the talk! I sez to him, sez I: 'If she thought she was a-losing of him, she'd melt a little.' Like enough, she'll try to—"

"Eh? What?" I exclaimed.

She looked up quickly, her eyes gleaming and twinkling.

"Oh, it's you, be it? Well, I'll be a getting of myself ready."

She arose and tripped away, and I stood looking after her, puzzling over the words I had heard, trying to fathom their meaning, and wondering to whom they could refer. I gave it up at length, and started to find Ettie.

"She is paying her *devoirs* to Mrs. Bostwick, I suppose," I thought, as I made my way to the invalid's reception room.

In passing through the conservatory my mind recurred to the episode that had transpired at the last dinner I had attended here, and involuntarily I looked over toward the window by which I had made my exit to follow Ettie, and I saw a form, which even in the darkness there seemed very familiar. I drew near—yes, it was Ettie, and she was stooping as if listening to some one talking softly.

All my jealousy aroused, I drew still nearer, till I could see quite distinctly—it was Ettie, stooping over a rustic seat, in which Harry Bostwick was reclining.

My jealousy was dispelled as, above the odor of the flowers, came to me the smell of liquor, and as I heard his words, uttered in a thick, husky voice that told of his maudlin condition.

"It wasn't I," he was muttering. "I had no—hic—object in doing it—had I?—hic. He was jealous of—hic—of Oliver. After a good deal of—hic—of telling—hic—I understood that he wanted him out of the way. But he couldn't—hic—soil his own hands. He's had his—hic—his thumb on me, ever since I began to pay my—hic—my debts with—hic—with other people's money. And that's how it—hic—came about. It was a fair—hic—a fair deal; I thought it was—hic—Oliver, and I made him—hic—mad, and we—"

"Ettie," I interrupted, sternly, stepping forward, fearful of the effect of these words upon her; for her face was as white and set as if cut from stone, her hands were locked together till it seemed as if she would crush them.

She looked up at me; deep horror was in her eyes. She raised one hand warningly.

"I do not wish you to listen longer," I said, firmly.

"He is past all sense—"

"That I'll allow—were he not he would not be talking like this."

"Will you come with me at once, Ettie? We are going."

"Why this anxiety," she asked, sharply. "Do you fear that I shall hear too much? Are you the one who was so jealous of Oliver Waldon that—"

She stopped as if frightened at her own words. So, she would now accuse me of being the instigator of the crime. Again my wounded dignity asserted itself, and a denial seemed degrading.

I stepped proudly back without a word. She stooped again to listen:

"She haunted me—she knows—hic—knows it! She looks at—hic—at me, and it makes my—hic—my head swim. I'm afraid of her!—hic. Take her away! She's—hic—looking at me now! Take her—hic—away! Tell her—hic—tell her that he was jealous of—hic—of Oliver, and it came about in that—hic—that way. Take her away, I say!—hic. She's looking at me, and she'll—hic—she'll make me tell it all! I must scream it out—I—hic—must!"

Ettie turned to me, whispering:

"For God's sake, Allan, quiet him! If they should hear," pointing toward the parlors, "what would become of you?"

"Do not fear for me," I returned, coldly. "If it comes to the point, I can and will prove to the world that which my wife is not willing to believe."

"Oh, I am, Allan! I do not doubt you, but I fear—oh, suppose the world should hear him! What would be thought? I know, and you know what rumor says, that *you* are jealous of Oliver Waldon!"

"Is Oliver Waldon dead yet? Can I be accused of his death while he still lives? How foolish you are! Be good enough to cease this childish talk, and make yourself ready to go home."

"If you were not so old and disagreeable you would appreciate my anxiety for you," she snapped, as she hurried from me.

I stood, gnashing my teeth with my rage. How could I endure this longer?

"I cannot, and I will not!" I cried to myself. "I will go away, and she shall never see me again!"

The idea, now that it had entered my mind, soon gained ground. I thought it over and over, and came to the determination of putting it into effect as soon as possible.

Of course it would not do to depart suddenly and quietly, and leave Ettie to the mercy of the gossips. I concluded that the best way to insure her welfare would be to give an entertainment, so that we could appear before the world together, and so that I could promulgate the fact of my intended departure.

I would go as if on a business tour, and no one but Ettie and myself would know that we were estranged.

I settled all this the following day, and then I sent word to Ettie, requesting her to come to my library. And so perverse was my nature, that while I contemplated my resolution with satisfaction, feeling relief at the idea of getting away from this atmosphere of suspicion, and fairly gloating over the idea of punishing Ettie for her doubts of me, I still hoped that she would make opposition to my plan, and even acknowledged that one little word, "stay," would make me the happiest of men.

As I heard her footfall—a sound to which I had listened so often, and which even now thrilled every fiber of my being, my determination wavered. I felt that I could not leave her—my wife, who, in spite of all, was so—so dear to me.

She entered, looking, oh, so lovely in her morning dress of dark green cashmere, bordered with silk of a lighter shade. I gazed upon her, then around about the room; here was beauty, elegance, luxury, and my love, but all clouded by the shadows of suspicion—that was my life now.

I looked out through the window; there was desolation, decay, dreariness—that was the life I proposed to enter. There were no shadows there—the bright sunlight flooded all, still I turned from it, and looked within again, saying in my heart:

"No, I cannot go; rather misery with her than a life of longing without her."

She had been standing before me while I had been making these mental observations.

"You sent for me, Allan," she said.

"Yes; and oh, Ettie," I began, going to her with extended hands.

She stepped back just a little, but even that little was apparent to me.

I stopped short, indignant.

Was my touch contamination?

"Do not trouble yourself," I said, hotly, retreating over to the window, thus placing the length of the room between us. "I shall relieve you of my odious presence altogether shortly. I sent for you to tell you that I am going away."

She started as if she were coming to me.

Oh, if even then she had said "Stay," I could have forgiven her.

But she said nothing; she stood still, looking steadily into the grate fire.

"Well, Ettie, have you nothing to say?"

My voice was a trifle husky, I know.

"Nothing," she replied, clearly and coldly.

"Do you not think it a wise course to pursue, under the circumstances?"

"Are you not old enough to think and decide for yourself?"

"I believe I am; I thought that I would like to have your opinion on the matter—"

"You do me too much honor."

"But if you have none to give, why, of course—"

"Certainly, to be sure," she interrupted, sharply.

"It was not my opinion you wanted, Allan Ingram; you expected me to fall down upon my knees—to cry, and wring my hands, and plead with you not to go. You are disappointed, are you not?"

And quickly she turned, and darted from the room, but not so quickly that I could not see the tears that had welled to her eyes.

"She does care," I said, exultantly, "but she will not acknowledge it. I will continue my preparations, and at the last moment she will bid me stay."

Buoyed up with that hope, I commenced my arrangement for departure cheerfully. I issued invitations to our "dear five hundred friends," and passed the intervening two weeks quite pleasantly, for Ettie's pale, sad face seemed to augur well for the consummation of my longing, that she would bid me stay.

It was the morning of the day on which our *soiree* was to take place—a bright, crisp November morning. I descended to the breakfast-room, humming lightly a gay tune, as I thought that on the morrow, the day I had fixed for my departure, the hope that I had lived on for the past weeks, would reap fruition.

Still humming lightly, I opened the door; the gay tune died on my lips as my eyes fell upon my ward; she was seated by the window as white and as rigid as a statue, her eyes closed, her lips compressed, the morning paper held in one hand with vise-like grip.

I sprang to her, calling:

"Beatrice—Beatrice!"

She shivered visibly, there was a slight twitching of lips and eyelids, then wearily and with great effort she looked up at me.

"You are faint," I said. "Let me call some one—"

"No, guardy, no. I will go to my room."

"What is it, Beatrice? Has anything happened?"

I looked toward the paper in her hand as I spoke.

"Nothing."

How dry and hard her voice was.

She passed me the paper, arose and started to go.

I glanced at it hurriedly; a familiar name caught my eye—Oliver Waldon. I looked again—yes, it was Oliver Waldon, and the paragraph in which it occurred was headed:

"Found Drowned."

On the impulse of the moment, I cried:

"Beatrice, did you see this?"

She turned her ghastly face to me, saying, huskily:

"What?"

"This about Oliver Waldon—"

She fairly staggered from the room; still it never occurred to me that she was suffering else than physically.

I turned to the paper again, and read:

"FOUND DROWNED."

"The body of a man was found in the bay near Deer Island, on Tuesday. It was conveyed to the morgue. His linen was marked with the name Oliver Waldon. No papers were to be found on his person to identify him further."

CHAPTER XV.

A DELIGHTFUL (?) EVENING.

"So, poor fellow, he is gone!" I exclaimed.

Was I sorry? No. Neither was I glad.

I felt regret that he had come to so untimely an end, and I determined to do what little I could for him now. I forgot that he was my enemy, and thought of him as the son of my old friend, now dead and gone.

I read the paragraph over again, and sighed:

"Poor fellow! What could have driven him to so rash an act? Remorse, I suppose."

I heard my wife approaching.

"She must not see this now," I said, hurriedly. "It would spoil her evening's pleasure. Time enough for her to hear it to-morrow."

And I thrust the paper into the grate.

Ettie entered, and looked in surprise at the flame.

"It's the morning paper," I explained.

"Shall I send Peter for another?" she asked.

"Don't trouble yourself, my dear."

"Oh, it's no trouble," and in a twinkling she was at the door, calling:

"Peter—Peter!"

"Ettie, don't trouble yourself," I said, impatiently.

"It's no trouble, I say. Peter, your master wishes you to—"

"Ettie," I interrupted, still more impatiently, "did you hear me? Do not trouble yourself."

"But it's no—"

"I tell you, I don't want a morning paper!"

"Then why did you not say so at first," she snapped, closing the door. "I thought I would do you a kindness—"

"You mean, you saw a chance to aggravate me."

"Please allow me the privilege of knowing what I mean. But why should that aggravate you?"

"I'm in no mood to explain just at present."

"You mean that you are in too disagreeable a mood—"

"Would you kindly allow me the privilege of knowing what I mean?"

The entrance of Aunt Phoebe put a stop to our words.

Immediately after breakfast I ordered my horse and buggy, and started to do what I could for the unfortunate son of my dead friend.

I will not enter into detail right here. I will simply

say that, upon arriving at the morgue, I found Leonard there, and together we looked upon the corpse of his brother; his brother, of course, as we both agreed, though there was nothing to prove it save the name on his linen, for his face was bloated and disfigured beyond all recognition.

"No one has seen or heard anything of him for more than two weeks," said Leonard. "He has evidently been in the water for that length of time."

I left Leonard to superintend the removal and burial of the body, and I started for my home, having just sufficient time to get there, and to make my toilet, before the guests would begin to come.

I drove quickly along, thinking of Oliver's death with a feeling of relief.

Then it occurred to me how imprudent I had been in keeping the knowledge of it from Ettie. Of course, I was not the only one who read the morning papers; others would have seen it as well as I, and the matter would, in all probability, be discussed at the *soiree*.

Ettie would hear of it suddenly, and, of course, she would display emotion before them all.

"I must tell her the instant I reach home," I said, laying the whip on my horse. "What a dolt I am, to be sure! Why didn't I think of that this morning?"

I drove along in the early darkness of the November evening, wishing now that I had given less time to the dead.

It seemed as if my horse only crept along—it seemed as if I would never reach home.

I fretted and fumed, and stormed and raved to myself.

In the midst of my irritation there came a crashing and cracking.

For a moment I seemed to be swaying in mid-air, and enveloped in deepest darkness.

My next realization was to find myself seated upon the ground, and to see lanterns flashing about me.

"Break-down, mister?" I heard.

"Yes, I see," I replied, absently peering at the wreck of the buggy.

Then I remembered what cause there was for me to be at home, and I started up like a rocket.

What could I do?

There was a distance of three miles before me, and it was impossible to get a conveyance in the vicinity in which I was.

"I'll have to walk, of course," I said.

Hastily negotiating with the men who had found me about the charge of my horse, I started on, heedless of everything in my desire to reach home in time, and soundly berating myself for having ventured out in the buggy without having ascertained if the damage it had received at the last encounter had been fully repaired.

It was some time before I noticed that the moon, now full, was rising.

"Great heavens!" I exclaimed. "Then it is late! I must have been stunned, and I have lost uncon-

sciousness."

My watch confirmed that fear—it was nine o'clock. Nine o'clock—a walk of two miles and half before me—and my wife waiting for me to assist her in the reception of our guests!

"What will she think? What will she say?" I groaned, as I half ran along. "It will be after ten by the time I reach home, and many of the guests will have come."

Oh, why—why, did everything go wrong with me?

I ran on and on, and at last I reached the entrance-gate to my estate.

Panting, breathless, exhausted, I paused for a moment to rest, and to wipe the perspiration from my face. I looked up at the house; lights gleamed from cello to garret, strains of music floated out on the night air, blended with the sound of gay voices, and merry laughter. The *soiree* was in full force, and my wife was without her husband!

Deep—deep, was my humiliation! How could I face those hundreds of wondering guests?

But it had to be done. I mustered up courage at length, and started on. Of course, I could not enter by the front door, so I hurried around toward the back.

The path at the side of the house was in partial shadow; but even if the moonlight had been streaming full upon it, I should not have seen anything, for all my faculties were engrossed with what was transpiring within.

"Oh!"

"Oh!"

Those two exclamations sounded out simultaneously, and I became aware that I had collided with somebody.

"I beg your pardon," I began, looking up to see who this party was.

But he had already commenced a retreat. I made out a tall, cloaked form, surmounted with a wide-brimmed hat; then I caught a glimpse of his face as he turned away. That one glimpse caused me to shiver from head to foot, for the face was Oliver Waldon's!

Amazement and fear blinded me for a moment; when I looked again, the face and form were gone.

I peered about, but in vain; I could see no one.

I rubbed my eyes, wondering if I had been the victim of a delusion.

"It was rather solid for a ghost," I muttered, as I walked on. "But I cannot stop to investigate now. Who can it be, that resembles Oliver so closely?"

I reached the back porch, and I forgot this episode as I contemplated my meeting with Ettie.

Oh, if I could only effect an entrance unseen! Had I been a thief, I could not have ascended the steps more cautiously.

I paused at the door to listen. I could hear the buzz of voices in the hall, but no one seemed to be in the vicinity of this door. After considerable hesitation, I ventured to open it; I opened it just a little, and peered in.

"Thank God!" I ejaculated, for Ettie was standing by the rear staircase, alone.

I could slip in, say a word of explanation to Ettie, and then hasten to my toilet.

I did slip in. I called softly:

"Ettie."

She turned, looked at me, started as if with horror, and opened her mouth as if she would scream.

Gesticulating frantically, I whispered:

"Hush—hush! Come this way."

And I retreated behind the staircase.

She approached, and I saw that she was pale and tremulous with anger.

Between her set teeth, she said:

"I thank you for your consideration for me. You might have spared me this last humiliation, at least."

"Why, Ettie, I thought it better to come late than not at all," I returned, humbly.

"But your condition," she half-sobbed. "Oh, Allan—Allan—I never thought to see you like this! Please—please don't stay here, for you will be seen."

"Why, what's the matter with me?"

"Don't you know?" she sneered. "Look at yourself in that glass yonder, and you'll see."

I did look, and I recoiled with horror.

Surely, I could not blame Ettie for her suspicion. One glance at myself in the glass satisfied me as to what it was.

She thought I was in liquor. Truly, I looked as if I were.

My clothes were bedaubed with mud (we had had heavy rains recently)—my coat was torn—I was hatless—and my face—oh, horror—my face! It had received its share of mud, and, as the reader will remember, I had wiped the perspiration from it. Imagine the consequence!

In my anxious haste, I had not given a thought to my appearance.

"Ettie, I can forgive you," I whispered. "I surely look as if I were—were—in fact, drunk. Where—where can I go? For Heaven's sake, let no one see me! Is it safe—do you think, my dear one, that it is safe for me to go up this staircase? Perhaps I had better go out and remain in the grounds till the guests have gone."

"No! Don't be a fool, Allan! You must come into the parlors, for I have been making all sorts of lame excuses for your absence. Oh, I have endured such humiliation!"

"I am very—very sorry, my dear."

"Well, don't stand there mumbling any longer—"

"No, I won't," I said, meekly.

After casting one despairing glance up the staircase, and wondering whom I should encounter on the way, I began the ascent.

Allan Ingram ascending the back staircase, and Allan Ingram descending the front staircase, were widely dissimilar.

I had regained my self-possession by the time my toilet was completed, and I entered the parlors, and made my excuses for my late appearance without experiencing any of the humiliation that I had anticipated.

"Thank God that is over!" I said to myself. "Now to play the agreeable host, and to insure my friends a delightful evening."

I looked around upon the goodly company—the elite of the place.

There were many beautiful ones present, but no one, to my eyes, could compete with my wife.

How very lovely she was to-night!

In her wavy brown hair were entwined the pearls that had been one of my wedding gifts to her, and her neck and arms were adorned with the same milk-white jewels.

Her dress was of silk of the faintest rose tint, elaborately trimmed with white lace.

She seemed to me to be the queen of the assemblage, and my heart swelled with pride.

I put away all discomfort—all sad thoughts—and determined to enjoy the evening to the full.

"It promises well," I said, complacently, as my wife passed me, and gave me a tender, grateful look. "She is thankful, I suppose, that her fear was groundless, and that her humiliation is over. Darling little Ettie! How beautiful she is, and how I love her!"

I looked around again, and my eyes rested upon Beatrice. She seemed to have recovered from her indisposition of the morning. She was dressed in black tulle, tastily adorned with knots of purple pansies; and a bunch of the flowers was fastened in her amber hair.

I happened just then to think of the paragraph in the paper, and that I had not told Ettie of Oliver's fate as I had intended. But Beatrice's curiosity must have been awakened by what I had said, and most likely she had procured a paper and read for herself; and, of course, Ettie would have heard that.

I started to go to my ward, to question her about this. She was standing by a window; I saw her look out, then start back as if frightened; then she looked out again, long and intently.

I thought of the person I had encountered, and I wondered if she were looking at him.

Suddenly, she turned away from the window. I saw her face, as white as death, her eyes dilated and full of dread. My heart sank.

"We are to have a scene, I suppose," I muttered, impatiently.

I hastened to her as I saw her swaying to and fro, and groping about for support; but ere I could reach her she had fallen unconscious to the floor.

She was carried from the parlors, and while Ettie attended to her, I put forth my best endeavors to bridge over this awkward break in the evening's pleasure.

I was determined to learn who it was that was

prowling about in the grounds; and when the general composure was restored, and I gained an opportunity for escaping unseen, I slipped out.

The bright moonlight flooded all, rendering objects distinctly visible. I looked quickly around, and I saw, or fancied that I saw, two forms at a distance from me. I concluded that it had been fancy, for as I started forward I could see but one, and he was staggering as if drunk with wine. As I neared him, he fell prostrate, his face to the ground.

I stooped over him to ascertain who he was, and what was the cause of his strange conduct. I had taken off his hat, and was preparing to turn his face toward me, when, moved by some unexplainable impulse, I looked up toward the house; and I saw a bright-robed figure emerge from the conservatory window, and hasten down the veranda toward the back porch. It was my wife!

Again jealousy gained sway, and suggested that she was coming to meet this fallen hero.

An idea darted into my mind, and in a twinkling I put it into execution.

"I will learn who he is, by-and-by," I muttered, as I fairly tore the long cloak from him, and wapped it about myself, and donned his wide-brimmed hat, drawing it down over my face.

Then I stepped forward to meet my wife.

CHAPTER XVI.

A DELIGHTFUL (?) EVENING—CONTINUED.

ETTIE hurried towards me. I knew that she saw me, for she raised one hand warningly, as if to bid me to be cautious.

I withdrew into the shadow of a large evergreen, and then I waited for her.

Even though my heart was filled with jealous rage, I could not but admire her as I saw her approaching.

How radiant she looked in the silver light that flooded all! Her face, so exquisitely fair, peeped out from the fleecy folds of the white wrap that enveloped her head and shoulders; and the diamonds on her hand gleamed and sparkled, shedding their iridescent light over silken robe, and falls of filmy lace.

"Oh, how I hoped as she stood there that her words would prove to me that she was true—that they would give me an inkling of that which she had said she could, but would not explain.

I fairly held my breath in my anxious eagerness.

She reached me at length. After one hurried glance back towards the house, she placed her hand upon my arm, and looking up at me, whispered in quick, anxious tones:

"Beatrice said that she saw you here. I felt that I must come to you, and tell you to hope. All may yet be well for us. Do not grieve, but wait patiently; and ere long you will—I know, I feel you will receive your reward. I cannot stay to say more now. Allan, you know, is so jealous, so unreasonable, and if he should miss me from the parlors I should have to endure another of his angry spasms. But he is going away—then I can see you without fear, and perhaps—perhaps I shall have ecstatic news for you; that your sorrow is at an end. Cheer up—the clouds are breaking, I feel sure, and we shall emerge from this darkness into the light of perfect day. I cannot give you time to say a word, for I fear so that Allan will miss me. Good-night—good-night!"

She turned quickly away. I stood still, groaning in spirit. How sadly had my hopes been dashed! What did my wife's words prove? To me they proved a falsity. And my absence would be so welcome—and Beatrice was in league with her, after all. Oh, bitter was the knowledge I had gained.

She was hurrying toward the house, and I was looking after her, too wretched to move—really stunned with my misery.

Suddenly she turned and darted back, and in the same quick, anxious tones, whispered:

"Come again to-morrow evening, and if all transpires as I hope, either Beatrice or I will see you."

As she turned from me again, I caught her arm and the one word burst from my lips:

"Falsel!"

I could not say more; anger and agony seemed to be stifling me.

A cry of dismay came from her.

I pushed back my wide-brimmed hat, and glared fiercely at her, as she clasped her trembling hands together, and lifted her eyes, now full of despair, to mine.

"Allan!" she exclaimed, faintly.

"Yes, Allan!" I returned, savagely. "I am that much-injured individual. At last—at last you stand before me self-convicted! Now, can you deny that you are false?"

"Yes."

"What!"

"I told you, yes."

"Great Heavens! woman, are you mad? You deny it now, when I have heard the words from your own lips that were intended for your hero, whoever he is."

"My hero!" and she laughed mockingly. "If you only knew, Allan—"

"I do know," I interrupted. "I am not quite in my dotage, madam, that I cannot understand what I see and hear."

"You don't know," she retorted. "You are altogether blinded by your jealous surmises." She had been peering about anxiously while speaking.

"You are looking for him, I suppose," I sneered.

"Have you seen him?" she asked, timidly.

"I have."

"And did you—"

"What?" as she hesitated.

"Did you speak to him?"

"How you tremble for his welfare!" I cried, hotly. "How you fear that I have even breathed rudely upon him! Yes, I have seen him. No, I have not spoken to him. Would you see him, madame? He lies yonder."

And I pointed toward the spot where that form had fallen.

"He lies yonder?" she faltered. "Oh, Allan, is he injured?"

"Is he injured?" I shouted. "How can you, in my presence, show such regard for him?"

"For him? No, Allan, it is not regard for him, but for you."

"For me! Ha—ha! 'tis a queer way to show your regard for me, I vow."

"Oh, can you not understand?"

"No; I confess I cannot."

"Oh, do you not see, Allan, why I tremble and fear? If he lies yonder, injured, who but you—"

"Ah, ha! I see now! Thanks, madame, thanks! You would now credit me with another crime! 'If he lies yonder injured who but me has done it,' is that what you would say?"

The dread, the fear in her eyes answered me.

"Then let me tell you," I said, between my shut teeth, "that you wrong me again. Your hero lies yonder, prostrated most likely from the effect of too many potations, taken to cheer his sinking heart while waiting for his enslaver. 'Tis a November night, remember, and the winds herald the approach of the ice-king; and however fiercely love may burn within, it cannot render one insensible to the cold. That reminds me! I have his cloak and hat upon my person, and he may be suffering. I will return them to him with thanks, for they have done me good service. A manly hero you have, Ettie; manly, indeed, to come prowling about like a thief—"

"Oh, Allan, have a little mercy!" she cried, piteously. "How can you be so bitter—so cruel? Wait but a little while, and all may be explained to you. I tell you, every unjust suspicion you have had of me—every unkind word you have spoken, will one day recoil upon yourself with redoubled intensity! I beg of you, be merciful to me; and Oliver—oh, you wrong him so!"

"Oliver!" I sneered. "Why do you plead for Oliver now?"

I could see her eyes dilate with fear; she extended her hands pleadingly, as she faltered:

"Now—plead for Oliver now? How strangely you talk, Allan. I do not understand."

"Then I will explain, madame; I ask you why you plead for Oliver now that he is dead."

In my anger, I had not thought that perhaps that would be news to her.

At the word "dead," she gave vent to a shriek that rang through the grounds.

"Hush! for Heaven's sake, hush!" I cried, drawing her to me, and retreating further into the shadow of the evergreen. "You will have all that assemblage at our heels."

"But, Allan—Allan," she moaned, "what did you say? Oliver dead—dead, did you say?"

Almost beside myself with rage, I answered unfeelingly:

"Yes, dead."

"Oh, Allan," she wailed, bowing her head.

"His loss is deeply felt," I sneered.

Oh, how jealousy racked my heart as I saw her so moved!

She did not heed my words. For a moment she stood with bowed head; then raising it, I saw her face so full of agony that even my stubborn heart cried out for her. Slowly pointing toward that spot to which I had pointed, she faltered:

"He is dead—and you say that he lies yonder."

"Not so, my dear; Oliver is dead, but who lies yonder I do not know."

"Why, it must be Oliver! Beatrice saw him—you saw him; do you not know that it is Oliver?"

"I tell you, it is *not* Oliver! I have seen him dead, to-day."

"Oh, how could you, Allan, when he was here to-night?"

"Heavens, woman, will you not even allow me to know what I see, and what I don't see! Oliver Waldon is dead—he died by drowning! All the world knows it, for it was in this morning's paper. I have seen his corpse—Leonard has seen it; and by this time he is, mostly likely, in his grave."

I saw that some new fear had assailed her; she was looking at me piteously, her lips were moving, but she was unable to utter a word.

"What is it?" I asked, almost tenderly, for her agony could but move the hardest heart. "Tell me, Ettie; what is it?"

With great effort she whispered, hoarsely:

"Allan, that was not Oliver you saw; it was Herbert."

"Nonsense! How could it be Herbert? Oliver's name was on his linen; how then—"

"Oh, it was Herbert!" she wailed.

"Impossible, my dear, impossible," I said, testily.

"It is strange that you will adhere to your idea with such obstinacy."

"And it is stranger still that you will not acknowledge that which is so reasonable. We know that Herbert was drowned—"

"Is it reasonable, my dear, to suppose that Herbert could be found with the clothes of an entire stranger upon him?"

She seemed about to say something there, but she checked herself. A moment's silence, and then she said, slowly:

"Allan, will you believe that it was Herbert you saw, if he who lies yonder is Oliver?"

"Such evidence, my dear, would convince the most stupid. I frankly say, I *will* believe in that case. In turn, may I ask you if you will believe

it was Oliver I saw, if he who lies yonder is *not* Oliver?"

"I will."

"Then come."

Together we hurried to the spot.

"There!" I exclaimed, triumphantly, as we reached it. "Now see for yourself."

"There! where?" she asked, peering about.

"Why, there," and I pointed again to the ground.

"Are you blind, Allan?"

"No, my love, I think not."

"Well, do you see anything there?"

"Certainly I do, my dear."

"Perhaps you'll have the goodness to look again."

I did look, and I exclaimed:

"Gone, by all that's wonderful!"

I had been pointing at a shadow.

"It was here, Ettie," I said, almost deprecatingly.

"But it is not here now."

"No."

"And you have his cloak and hat."

"Yes."

"And, Allan, there'll be trouble! Why—why have you done this?"

"Tush—tush, woman! How you exasperate me! What have I done now? simply borrowed some one's wearing apparel, and—"

A sharp, shrill whistle interrupted me.

I peered out from behind the evergreen, and I saw a man standing on the veranda just outside of the conservatory window. I heard the whistle again, and I knew that it came from him.

"We have been missed, and probably overheard," I whispered, dismayed. "It will not do for us to be found here. What would our guests think? See, he is hastening down toward the back porch. Quick—quick, my dear one, and hurry to the other side of the house before he sees us."

"Oh, Allan, I tremble with fear."

"Pray postpone your trembling, my love, and hasten. There, he has turned the corner; now is our time! We will gain entrance to the house before he has had time to return."

Like two culprits, we ran across the grounds, and around to the back porch.

There Ettie whispered:

"For Heaven's sake, Allan, take off that cloak and hat! And do—do hide them somewhere, for I fear so that there will be trouble!"

I took them off, wishing heartily I had never donned them, and made as small a bundle of them as was possible.

Ettie entered by a lower door, and I ascended the porch, and for the second time that evening, sneaked into my own house.

I gained the hall. Guests were passing back and forth; I could not take time just then to secrete the bundle that was under my arm. I hurriedly threw it by the side of the hat-stand near the door; and then, calling a smile to my face, I mingled once more with my guests.

A delightful evening, indeed—*delightful!*

CHAPTER XVII.

A DELIGHTFUL (?) EVENING—CONCLUDED.

I breathed freely again as I saw Ettie moving among the guests, playing the agreeable hostess. I looked after her—to me the bright star in all that brilliant assemblage—and I wondered if her smiles were as hollow as mine were.

In the midst of my contemplation I felt a hand upon my shoulder.

I turned quickly, and saw—Uncle Waldon!

I looked the astonishment I felt, I suppose, for he said:

"I'm the last person you expected to see here—eh?"

"To speak frankly, you are, sir. How—how did—"

I was as confused as a school-boy facing his stern master, as I looked at my friend with the remembrance of our last meeting in my mind.

"How did I get here? I drove out here this afternoon, and was really disappointed to find you absent."

"But—but I thought that you desired—desired to—"

"Yes—yes, I understand—to remain incog. Yes—yes, of course—well, so I do. You must not know me now, you know; at least, not in my own identity—see? I am trying to learn the worth of my nephews, you know, and it is in pursuance of that object that I have intruded here to-night—see?"

"Yes," I said, absently, for I didn't see at all.

I was thinking of Oliver's death, a fact of which his uncle seemed to be ignorant. Should I tell him now?

"There is no danger of his fainting, I suppose," I argued to myself.

I resolved to tell him, lest he should hear of it in a harsher way.

I put my arm through his, and led him off toward the conservatory, as I said:

"Have you seen this morning's paper?"

"No."

"I thought not."

"And why?"

"Because if you had you would not have been here to-night."

"I don't exactly see your drift, my friend."

"No, of course not. Waldon, my dear friend, can you bear to hear sad news?"

He looked at me in surprise. I met his gaze sorrowfully, and placing my hand upon his in a condoling sort of way, I went on:

"You haven't seen Oliver for the past two weeks, have you?"

"Well, what of it?"

"He has been found—"

I thought I saw an amused twinkle in his eye. It deepened my commiseration for him, for it told how little he suspected of that which I was about to say.

"Found," he said, jovially. "How?"

"Drowned!" I replied, solemnly.

And I averted my face, so that I would not see the grief upon his.

"Found drowned!" he replied.

His tone did not sound very sad, and I looked at him again; there was no sign of grief upon his face; he was as composed as ever I had seen him.

"Tell me about it, Ingram," he added.

I told him. He seemed very much interested, especially when I came to the mention of Leonard, and the disposal of the body.

"It is sad," I said, in conclusion, "very sad. But, of course, we cannot mourn his loss as we would if he had led a different life. I cannot but feel that it is well that he is gone, for he was a source of discomfort to others, and he surely must have been to himself."

"To you, did you say, Ingram?"

"Oh, no—dear, no, not at all!"

"I beg pardon, I misunderstood you. So he is dead; then I have only one nephew to look after."

"Yes, only one. But he will scarcely need looking after; Leonard, to me, is a pattern."

"Of what?"

"Why, of goodness, to be sure."

"Oh, yes, certainly; I didn't know but that you were an admirer of villainy."

I was not exactly pleased with my friend's facetiousness; it seemed untimely. But further thought on that subject was interrupted by the approach of Ettie.

Her coming was a relief to me, and without stopping to think, without noticing the glance of recognition that passed between her and Uncle Waldon, I hastened to say:

"Allow me—this is my wife, Ettie; this is my friend, Mr. —"

Suddenly I remembered his desire to remain incog. I looked at him helplessly; we had not prepared for such an emergency as this. Though forty names flitted through my brain I could not decide upon one.

"Mr.—my friend Mr.—," I stammered, hopelessly.

He whispered something, but in my confusion I could not hear; he whispered again, but to no use. I glanced at Ettie, and seeing her look of deep surprise, said, desperately:

"Why, to be sure, this is my friend, Mr. Benton."

I felt a nudging at my elbow, I heard Ettie exclaim, and I knew that I had made some sort of mistake.

I looked appealingly from one to the other; as if begging of them to tell me what I had done.

"I came this afternoon, I told you," said Uncle Waldon, *sotto voce*, "and, of course, I met your wife!"

Dolt! why had I not thought of that?

Ettie's surprise at last found vent in words.

"Benton," she said, looking distrustfully at both of us. "I understood, this afternoon, that it was Gordon."

"Yes—yes," returned my friend, hurriedly, "Gordon, or Benton, it's all the same. 'What's in a name?' you know; call me either, or both."

Ettie did not appear to be at all satisfied with the choice of names, so he added:

"Benton, however, is my name. In my confusion this afternoon—you see, Mrs. Ingram, I'm not used to the society of ladies, and I was quite confused when I met you, and unconsciously I gave you the name of a friend, instead of my own."

I saw that he was annoyed at having been placed upon so doubtful a footing, and I berated myself soundly for my stupidity.

I was anxiously watching for an opportunity of slipping away, that I might try to regain my composure. I looked around, hoping that some one would call me, and I saw that Beatrice had returned to the parlor.

I directed Ettie's attention to her.

"That is your ward—is it not?" asked Uncle Waldon, eagerly. "Pray present me to her."

She was coming toward us. Never had she appeared so beautiful to me: perhaps it was because she seemed less severe.

I was really fond of my ward, and in my delight at seeing her recovered, I forgot the unpleasant episodes that had transpired.

"I am glad to see you down again," I said, gently; then turning to Uncle Waldon, I added:

"Allow me—this is my ward, Miss Ghent. Beatrice, this is my friend, Mr.—Mr.—"

Oh, how unfortunate! I could not remember upon which name we had decided, Gordon or Benton?—Benton or Gordon?—no, I could not remember.

"What was the name?" I whispered to him.

I saw that Beatrice and Ettie were exchanging surprised, distrustful looks, and without waiting for a reply, I added, desperately:

"Gordon—my friend, Mr. Gordon."

Again I felt a nudging at my elbow, and again I heard Ettie exclaim:

"Another mistake!"

Irritated beyond measure, I looked at Ettie and fairly growled:

"What now?"

"You forgot, my dear, that this gentleman's name is Benton; at least, that is the name by which you introduced him to me."

"Was it?" I asked, helplessly appealing to Waldon.

"Gordon?—yes," he replied, confusedly. "I beg your pardon—I mean Benton. Yes, Benton," he added

heartily, as if satisfied at having at last established his own identity.

And he took the hand of the surprised Beatrice, and muttered an acknowledgement of the introduction.

"What next?"

I could not but ask myself that. Oh, what an evening this had been! Was it possible that anything more could occur? Events, thus far, had fairly been treading one another's heels.

Scarcely had I framed that question when I beheld the form of Aunt Phoebe looming in the distance.

My heart sank. If that had been her in Oliver's office that day, would there be a recognition now? If so—but I dared not think of what might follow.

I watched her with bated breath as she approached.

Yes, she was tripping right toward us, her little curls bobbing with every step she took.

As she reached us, I looked at Uncle Waldon. I met his gaze, and I'm sure there was an amused twinkle in his eyes, and that there was a smile lurking about his mouth.

He turned aside quickly, and Ettie seized that opportunity to whisper to me, in a tone of irony:

"If you intend to introduce him to Aunt Phoebe, I should advise you to learn his name first."

I had no time to reply, for Aunt Phoebe's shrill treble fell on my ears:

"My sakes! How d'ye do, Mr. Waldon?"

"Waldon!" exclaimed Ettie.

"Waldon!" exclaimed Beatrice.

I stood as if petrified; it had been Aunt Phoebe then, and she not only recognized him, but also knew his name.

I forgot my own dismay, however, upon beholding my friend's. He was winking and shaking his head—a pantomime that, to me, plainly said:

"Don't—I beg of you don't recognize me."

She seemed to understand, for she looked toward us, saying:

"La, now! if I haven't been mistaking of the person."

Both wife and ward seemed dissatisfied with her explanation, and I knew that it was a fabrication.

An uncomfortable silence fell upon us, and each one seized the first opportunity to go.

How I wished that I were alone in some vast expanse, that I might shout out my vexation!

I stalked over to the conservatory, and there in the dim light that prevailed, I thrust my hands deep down into my pockets, and paced to and fro. But scarcely a minute had elapsed when I heard Ettie's voice at my elbow.

"Allan, who is that man?"

"My dear, don't trouble me!" I exclaimed. "I have told you that he is my friend."

"It is very singular," she returned, "that both he and yourself are so undecided about his name. What is it? Benton, Gordon, or Waldon?"

"Didn't I tell you it was Benton?"

"But that doesn't make it so. I'll tell you what I think, Allan—I think his name is Waldon; and I think more—I think he is Oliver's uncle, returned from India."

"My dear, you think too much," I replied, testily, "and too much thinking might make you mad. Pray, be careful, my love."

"I see you do not wish to answer me, Allan."

"Nonsense, Ettie! Don't you suppose, if Mr. Waldon had returned from India, that Leonard would have known it? Waldon is not an uncommon name."

"Then that is his name?"

"Did I say it was?"

"You implied it."

"Well, have it as you please—take your choice, my dear—one or all. Only don't trouble me about it just now. There—there comes the queen of the gossips! Pray, go; it isn't *au fait*, you know, for husband and wife to be whispering together like this. Go, my love."

She obeyed, and once more I put my hands into my pockets, and prepared to give myself up to gloomy meditation.

Why had Uncle Waldon taken the news of Oliver's death so calmly? Could it be possible that I had seen Herbert at the morgue, and that it was Oliver whom I had encountered in the grounds? But no—no, that could not be! The name on the dead man's linen was proof, and too—if Oliver were not dead—how was it that nothing had been heard of him for the past two weeks?

"Oh, have you heard?"

"Heavens!" I muttered, wrathfully. "Am I to be treated to another of Marian Stewart's delectable *conversaciones*? Was ever a man so tortured as I?"

"About Oliver Waldon? Oh, yes! Isn't it sad?"

"Sad?—it is heart-breaking! I declare, when I read it in the paper I almost fainted."

"Suicide, do you suppose?"

"Undoubtedly. Oh, I knew that something terrible would happen when I saw him so changed!"

"They'll try to keep the matter very quiet, I suppose?"

"Undoubtedly. Publicity would reveal too much. Leonard Waldon and Mr. Ingram are good friends, which is certainly very fortunate for Mr. Ingram; for it is well known that he was jealous of Oliver, and it might be thought that—"

"What?"

"Oh, I wouldn't say a word. I'm not inclined to talk much, you know, and I wouldn't say a word to make trouble. Of course, a jealous man will do anything for revenge—but I will not say a word—I won't even insinuate."

I could not endure more. I started from my retreat, wondering where I could go and be at peace.

I had not taken a half-dozen steps when I saw that Uncle Waldon had been a listener to the above as well as myself. I stood stock still as this query en-

tered my mind: might he not be influenced by what he had heard.

That was an unpleasant reflection, and I put it from me for the time, and turned my attention again to my duties as host; and I'll venture to say, that a more uncomfortable, disturbed, distressed host never existed.

Later in the evening, as I was passing out into the hall, Ettie met me, her face pale, her eyes full of fear and dread.

"Oh, Allan," she whispered, "come with me, at once."

"Yet more!" I groaned. "What is it now?"

"Give me your arm, and walk down the hall with me."

I obeyed, mechanically.

We reached the lower end of the hall, and there Ettie stopped, saying:

"Look."

I did, and saw Uncle Waldon standing by the hat-stand near the rear door, examining the cloak and hat that I had thrown there; by his side was Aunt Phoebe, who was gazing at him in an anxious, troubled way.

I heard his words distinctly.

"He came with me, and was to be in the grounds this evening. I have whistled for him, and I have searched for him, but he is not there. His cloak and his hat are here—but where is he? I fear there has been foul play."

"Oh, Allan, do you hear?" whispered Ettie, in a terrified tone. "I'm sure he is a detective! There is some mystery about him; his coming here to-day was something strange; and, too, this confusion about his name seems strange. Oh, I feel that he is not a friend of yours! I'm sure he is a detective! Oh, what will you do?"

"I'll tell you, my love; I'll ask you to keep quiet, and not alarm the persons present. If you will oblige me in that you will do me an inestimable favor."

I spoke lightly, but my heart was sorely troubled, and filled with forebodings of evil.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TO GO, OR NOT TO GO.

THE dawn of another day brought with it new cares and new perplexities.

I sat, in the early morning, looking out upon the scene of fast-descending rain, swaying, naked boughs, and fluttering, withered leaves, with gloom in my heart full as deep.

I sat, feeling like one who had just awakened from a horrible nightmare. I could not but shudder as I thought of the events of the preceding evening.

How had my high hopes been dashed!

How I had pictured to myself, during the two weeks between the time of Bostwick's dinner and the *soirée*, the felicity that was to be mine; our entertainment a success, guests and ourselves made happy, and Ettie bidding me stay. How different realization from anticipation! Not only had I received most convincing proof of Ettie's falsity, but there was that cloak and hat, still in the hall, to trouble me.

I had been on the point of explaining to Uncle Waldon how the articles had come there, but I had been stayed by the reflection that if I explained that I would reveal all—Ettie's falsity, and my jealousy. The matter would have to be developed without word or aid from me; on that I was determined.

This was the day I had fixed for my departure.

To go, or not to go, was now the question with me. Inclination said, "not to go," but all my preparations were made, and would it not seem as if I had been making a childish threat if I did not go? And, too, could I endure this discomfort—suspicious, dissensions, accusations—any longer? No—decidedly, no!

"I will go," I said, to myself. "Oh, that I could go to the ends of the earth! Anywhere—anywhere, where I could be alone with my sorrow!"

I wisely concluded to be satisfied with a trip out West, from whence a return was not impossible. I would not expatriate myself from my home altogether, for deep down in my heart the fount of hope still played, murmuring a time when the tempest would be over, and eternal sunshine would reign.

For one single moment I harbored the determination to remain and play the spy upon my wife's actions, as I remembered the words she had whispered to me that were intended for her hero; but only a moment—then I scoffed at the idea. No! I would not force Ettie to be true; if she did not love me, I would rather we were strangers.

I had my breakfast *solus* in the library, and then I completed the arrangements for Ettie's comfort during my absence.

When all was done, and there remained nothing but the leave-takings, I began to feel very—very sad.

I was, in a manner, expelling myself from my own home—and for what?

Was I not scourging myself for another's sin?

Was I not going out into the world to wander, wretched and forlorn, when she, who was at fault, would remain by the glowing fireside and enjoy the comforts of home?

"But it is too late now to retract," I said, sorrowfully. "I've got to go. Yes, I actually felt obliged to leave my own home; and the sharpest sting of all is, that no one will regret my absence. Well, if I must, I suppose I must! I'll go for a week, anyway. How manly I should feel to return in a week, after having made so much talk about going away forever!" I added, angrily—angry with myself for clinging to everything connected with home and Ettie. "I can imagine myself entering the house

sheepishly, and looking at Ettie pleadingly, as if begging of her not to laugh at me. No—if I go, I stay!"

"If I go." Why, did I say that? Was it possible that I still hoped that Ettie would not let me leave her?

Yes, even so. A thrill of joy passed over me as I thought how gladly, at her behest, I would put down my traveling bag, remand all my orders, undo all my arrangements, forget all my humiliation, close my eyes to all discomfort, and remain at home with wife and love.

I left my library to seek her, to hear her say "stay," or to bid her "good-by."

I met Beatrice in the hall.

"I was just coming to see you, guardy," she said; "you go to-day, do you not?"

Not the least regret in her tone, rather relief; and it seemed as if she were anxiously waiting for my reply.

"Yes," I replied, bitterly; and I added, still more bitterly, as I saw the anxiety vanish from her face:

"You will miss me greatly, I have no doubt."

"Indeed I will, guardy."

"And Ettie will, too?"

"Oh, I'm sure she will."

"A sad—sad household this will be."

"It will, indeed."

"Perhaps I had better remain at home; my departure might produce too serious an effect upon you all. I can put it off for awhile—"

"Oh, no, guardy; you must not think of such a thing! You really need the change—"

"That is just exactly what you need, Beatrice, it seems to me."

"Why?"

I could see a glimmering of agony in her eyes.

"Why—tell me why you fainted last night, and then I may be able to answer you."

A spasm contracted her features for a moment; it was as if the agony she had been trying to stifle had asserted itself at my words. When she spoke, it was in a dry, hard, unnatural tone:

"I don't care to speak of it, guardy. I wish to forget it. It's my heart, I believe; the least thing startles me so, and seems to stop its beating."

"What startled you last night?"

Another spasm. How deathly white her face had become. She struggled desperately to overcome her emotion, darting pained, reproachful glances at me the while, as if she would chide me for having opened a wound that she had succeeded in healing.

"Why, Beatrice," I said, "I shall fear to leave you like this. Really—"

"Oh, no, guardy, do not think of it! It will soon pass over. I was so startled last night; and now as I recall it, it makes my heart stand still. Oh, why did you speak of it," she wailed, turning aside, and leaning her head against the baluster. "I have tried so hard to forget it!"

"I am sure, my dear Beatrice, I cannot see any cause for all this emotion. Surely, your heart cannot affect you like this."

"Of course not; but it is the remembrance of—"

"Of what?"

"Of what I saw last night."

"Well, what did you see?"

Her face was concealed from me, as she still leaned against the baluster, but her voice told of intense suffering, even though her words were accompanied by a laugh—oh, such a hollow, pitiful laugh.

"A vision, guardy—the wraith of—of Oliver Waldon!"

"It is not possible that you are becoming superstitious, Beatrice!"

"I hope not. Still, it must have been a vision, for—"

"Nonsense, child! I met your vision in the grounds, and unless ghosts are as solid as mortals, then—"

She turned swiftly to me, and caught my arm, as she interrupted, breathlessly:

"You met him? Who was it? Was it Oliver?"

"That would have been impossible, since I had seen Oliver lying in the morgue—"

A low, sharp cry from her, and she turned away again, and bowed her head.

"Are you interested in him, too?" I asked, in surprise.

"I am not a stone," she cried, passionately, "that I can hear of such things unmoved! Oh, it is terrible!—dead—drowned! How cruel—Do I surprise you, guardy?" she broke off, suddenly, turning swiftly towards me.

"You do, indeed."

"I can surprise you more, I believe," and she laughed again that hollow, pitiful laugh.

"You can? How?"

"By telling you that when Leonard Waldon asks me again to be his wife, as I am vain enough to believe that he will, I shall accept him. Now you are surprised, I see."

"Yes, surprised and delighted—delighted, Beatrice. It has always been my most earnest wish—"

"I know all that by heart, guardy. Please say no more about it. I will accept him, and marry him, but I cannot endure to hear it talked of constantly."

"Leonard will be transported with joy at your decision, Beatrice. The poor fellow was bewailing his fate, only yesterday. Suppose he insists on a speedy marriage?"

"Could he think of such a thing now?" she asked, hotly. "Could he go from a burial to a wedding? If he is so callous that he can, one day, be chief mourner, and the next day, a bridegroom, then I will recall my answer."

"But, you know, my dear ward, that Oliver and he, though brothers, never were friends; and you—of course, Oliver's death is nothing to you."

"Of course not!" she cried, with a vehemence that the occasion, to me, did not seem to require.

For a moment, some violent emotion overpowered her, for she raised her hands to her head with a gesture of despair, and moaned softly. Ere I could say a word she had controlled herself; taking my hands in hers, and kissing them, she said, gently:

"When you come back, guardy, whether it be in one year, or two, or more, we will talk of my marriage. The world may know me as Leonard Waldon's affianced; I am in no haste to be his bride."

I did not demur at this; in fact, I was rather pleased with the arrangement, for it would make it a necessity for me to return to my home some time.

She bade me good-by, and then left me suddenly.

I stood for a while, wondering what had occurred to change my stately ward like this; then I started on to say the next "good-by."

As I was passing by Aunt Phoebe's room, her door opened, and the little woman appeared.

She met my gaze with perfect equanimity, as she piped:

"Are you a-taking of yourself off to-day?"

Here, too, was that same anxiety evident, as if it were feared that I would not go. Was ever a man paid so little deference by 'is family as I?

"Yes," I replied, "I depart to-day," and I extended my hand to her.

She took it, and looking up at me with a most lugubrious cast of countenance, said:

"Poor Ettie."

It seemed as if she were mocking me. Of course it irritated me, and I returned, almost sharply:

"Yes—yes, poor thing!—but you'll take care of her, Aunt Phoebe?"

"Oh, la, yes! And shall I be a-taking care of them things in the hall, too? that cloak and hat. Et's so scared of 'em that she wouldn't touch 'em with a forty-foot pole. What'll I do with them?"

"Anything you please," I snapped. "Wear them, if you like. Good-by, Aunt Phoebe—good-by."

As I turned to leave her I could not restrain my desire to give her a thrust. I said, and spitefully I know:

"How is your toothache, Aunt Phoebe?"

"Buried," she replied, solemnly.

Her answer startled me. I hurried away from her without another word, wondering if it had not been Herbert that I had seen at the morgue, as I remembered how she had confounded him with her toothache.

As I reached Ettie's rooms, I forgot all else as I queried: Will it be "stay," or "good-by!"

"If it is 'stay,'" I said to myself, "it will be a little awkward for me, now that I have bidden two of the family good-by. However—"

And I opened the door slowly, softly.

I remained on the threshold, enthralled, thrilled with both joy and sadness, as I gazed at the picture before me.

The room, with its blue silk hangings, that were relieved with linings of faintest pink, its tufted chairs and *tete-a-tete* of pale blue, its carpet of light grey trailed with sprays of roses and blue-bells; its bronzes, and vases, and statuettes, and all the innumerable *bijouterie* that evince taste and wealth, was filled with the gloom of the rainy day. Even the fire in the grate glowed in a dull, dead sort of a way, casting up a flicker, now and then, lazily and feebly.

Deep silence reigned, save for the ticking of the ormolu clock on the mantel, that sounded out to me with painful distinctness, as it seemed to measure off the moments that were yet mine ere I must part with my wife, perhaps forever.

Deep silence reigned, and yet Ettie was there.

She evidently had not heard me, for she remained bowed upon the table that stood in the recess of the oriel window.

Upon her my eyes rested, eagerly noting every detail of the attitude in which I had found her.

A long robe of silver grey, trimmed with bands of blue velvet, swept gracefully about her; frills of delicate lace fell over her hands, as they were clasped above her head, gleaming marble-white against her lovely brown hair.

Above and about her the blue silk curtains hung, forming a canopy beneath which she sat, bowed with grief—at what? Was it at Oliver's death, or my departure?

Beyond her was the rain, and that sighing, sighing wind—a type of the desolation to which I was about to consign myself.

I entered softly, my heart beating quickly, painfully.

Would it be "stay," or "good-by?"

CHAPTER XIX.

OUR PARTING.

ALL the deep, rapturous love I had felt for Ettie during our happy courtship was with me again as I softly approached her.

I reached her, and still she had not heard me—still she sat there, bowed beneath the blue silk curtains.

I stood by her in silence, looking at her lovingly—longingly—hesitating to speak, for fear that words would dispel the hopes in my heart.

I looked at her, then at the gloomy scene without, and I wailed to myself:

"How can I live without her? Oh, that she would bid me stay!"

I placed my hand gently on her shoulder, and in my softest tone, said:

"Ettie."

She started as one just awakened from a deep sleep.

She looked up at me quickly.

I saw her face tear-stained, and her eyes heavy and swollen.

Hope leaped exultingly, whispering:

"She will not let you go."

I felt quite sure what her reply would be, so I spoke cheerfully:

"I have come, my dear, to say good-by."

My face was lighted with smiles, I know—my eyes were full of gladness—my hands were half-extended; all this was in anticipation of the words I was eagerly waiting to hear.

She looked at me in silence.

Had she not heard me?

I said again:

"My dear, I have come to say good-by."

I saw her lips quiver, and her eyes fill with tears.

Ah, surely the longed-for word was coming now!

I stood smiling with expectation.

At last she spoke:

"Since you seem so delighted to go, I can only say, 'God speed you,' and 'good-by.'"

What!

For a moment I could scarcely realize that my fond hope had met with disappointment.

I stepped back, and looked at her in amazement.

"What—what did you say?" I stammered.

"I said good-by. There is no need of my saying more—of wishing you a pleasant time—for your looks tell that you are anticipating that."

How calmly—how coldly she spoke!

Not one regret! only a careless good-by.

And I had hoped so much!

I stood erect with offended dignity, as I began, hotly:

"You are an unfeeling woman!"

She arched her eyebrows, as if surprised.

I began again:

"Yes, you are an unfeeling woman!"

Starting from her chair, and supporting herself by leaning one hand upon the table—for she was trembling in every limb—she interrupted me, passionately:

"Unfeeling, am I? Why? Because I will not minister to your conceit—because I do not weep, and moan, and plead with you not to go! You forget how you torture me—torture me till my heart turns against you, and hate takes the place of love! You come to me, and say, 'good-by;' you say it carelessly—smilingly—to show me what joy you feel in paining me; then you expect me to weep, and plead. Why? So that you can torture me more! It is you who are unfeeling! And more than that, you are cruel—cruel—"

Her passion choked her, and she was forced to stop in the midst of her tirade.

She looked grand as she stood there by the table, trembling, her eyes flashing, her face fired with indignation.

I never loved her more than at that moment, but the thought that she would not bid me stay made me bitter.

I said, in a cold, taunting tone:

"Are you through? Pray do not stop in consideration for me, for I quite enjoy this. You look your best when in a pet as now, and your eloquence at such a time is astonishing. If you are not through, pray proceed, my love. I have time"—and I took out my watch and looked at it—"yes, I have plenty of time to listen to you."

"It would please you, I have no doubt, if I would lash myself till I felt bleeding at your feet. My words only amuse you; to me, each one is as a knife-thrust, as I thus speak of your cruelty, your—"

"Are you studying for the tragic stage, my love?" I interrupted. "Are you not rehearsing to me some of your lines? Pray remember we are living in the nineteenth century, and your flights of imagination seem, to say the least, ridiculous. Now, if we were living in the olden time, they—"

"Age will ever try to appear young," she interrupted, mockingly. "If I speak in an antediluvian strain, it is because I wish to adapt myself to present company."

Another thrust at my years!

If in all else she failed to irritate me, in that she always succeeded.

In a tone so cold that my words sounded like the clinking of ice against glass, I said:

"I believe, madame, that I have now received compliments enough to last me through a lengthened journey—such as I propose to take."

Her hands clutched each other involuntarily.

Ah, she was moved!

"A lengthened journey?" she faltered.

"Yes, madame, a lengthened journey," I replied, with apparent satisfaction.

"Where—where are you going, Allan?"

"It has seemed a matter of so little moment to you, that I have not thought to tell you."

"Will you tell me now?" she asked, sharply.

"Certainly. I think of going abroad."

She suddenly turned away from me, and looked out of the window.

I saw that she was trying to suppress her emotion; I saw her stealthily wiping away her tears. At last, her emotion overpowered her; with one great sob, she bowed her head against the window-pane.

At that, all my bitterness vanished, all my love returned, and I sprang to her, caught her in my arms, and held her in close embrace.

She clung to me, sobbing the while.

Oh, surely my wife loved me! Again, yet again. Hope leaped up in my heart. Though its flame had been quenched, so many—many times, it leaped up again, brighter than ever before.

"Oh, Ettie," I whispered, "let us put aside this miserable assumption of indifference, and be happy. I love you so dearly—"

"And I love you so dearly," she murmured, as she twined her arms about my neck, and raised her lips to mine. "The bare thought of your leaving me breaks my heart—"

"And the bare thought of going breaks mine," I replied, as I kissed her tenderly. "Why do we so persistently abuse each other, Ettie, when if we would only allow it, we could be as happy as the happiest?"

"I know it, Allan. Now—just now, when your arms are about me, when I hear you speak lovingly, I am so—so happy; but"—and she sighed.

I sighed, too.

"But what, Ettie, dear?"

"Oh, there is so much unexplained between us! Till that is all made clear, we cannot be perfectly happy."

"To what have you reference now, my love?"

"To everything that has happened of late."

"Let us forget it."

"Oh, that is impossible!"

"It is not, my love."

"Oh, it is, Allan, it is! I know. Please don't say it is not, when I say that it is!"

"Are you not forgetting yourself now, my love?"

"Forgetting myself—how?"

"By beginning to disagree—"

"I am not disagreeing, Allan—it is *you*! I say that a thing is so, and you say that it isn't, when you don't know anything about it at all. Oh, please, Allan, don't quarrel with me now, just when you are going away!"

"Going away—am I going away?"

"Why, of course! Didn't you say you were?"

"To be sure, I did; but then, I thought that—that—"

"What?"

"That we were reconciled, my dear."

"And so we are, I hope, Allan," and she elung closely to me again, and rested her head on my shoulder.

"Then why should I go away? You do not wish me to go—do you?"

"No—no! As I have said, it breaks my heart to think of it even! But—"

"Another but," I exclaimed, testily, irritated at her strange behavior. "What is it now, Ettie?"

"You had better go, Allan," she sighed.

"What a contradiction you are, Ettie," I said, holding her from me, and looking keenly at her. "A contradiction—a puzzle. Speak plainly, for Heaven's sake, so that I can understand you; shall I go, or stay?"

"Go."

The word came like a fluttering breath, as if she feared to utter it.

I stepped from her, saying coldly:

"That one word is all-sufficient, I will go."

"But oh, Allan," she pleaded, "do not go abroad."

"What difference can it make to you where I go for if I go, I stay."

"Oh, don't say that, Allan! There will come a time when all will be explained, and then we can be happy."

"The future is uncertain, my dear, you must remember. I cannot place faith in it," and I turned coldly away.

"I don't suppose you can," she snapped, "since it is likely that, for you, the future will be short. Your three-score-and-ten are almost numbered."

Still another thrust at my age.

Again I became frigid.

"Then you cannot blame me for wishing to enjoy the present," I said, coldly.

"No!" she cried, passionately. "And since going away from me is pleasure for you, go! in Heaven's name, go, and torture me no more!"

Her tone touched me, and I determined to make one last effort.

"Ettie," I said, kindly, turning to her, "you do not wish me to leave you?"

"No."

"And still you will not bid me stay?"

"No. You had better go, Allan. We cannot live like this—this! Oh, it will be worse, much worse than this if you remain! Oh, you must go! I cannot say 'stay,' though my heart cries out for you! You must go; but some time you will come back, and we will be happy. You will not leave me altogether, Allan? promise me that."

I looked at her, coldly, critically; then, sighing deeply, I said, slowly:

"Ettie, I wish I knew whether you are the most suffering, or the most deceitful of women."

"Allan, have you not pained me enough?" she pleaded.

Without heeding her, I went on:

"You are either the victim of most adverse circumstances, or you are an intriguing most politic."

"Oh, Allan, spare me this bitterness now!"

Again unheeding, I continued:

"You naturally feel restraint in my presence, therefore you wish me gone; still you desire to keep in my good graces, for my name shields you, and my money—"

A flashing of her eyes warned me to stop, but I did not.

"My money procures for you the luxuries that others could not give. Your way is a path of roses; to blind me you endeavor to make me believe that you are treading a path of thorns."

"That is enough, Allan Ingram!" Her voice rang, clear and steady, through the room. "I shall not try to defend myself again. There is nothing left for us to say but 'Good-by.'"

"Very well, madame. I have made every arrangement for your comfort."

I looked at her as if expecting her to say something.

She simply bowed.

"My lawyer will communicate with you when it is necessary."

Again I paused and looked.

Again she bowed.

"I leave my ward in your charge."

Another look.

Another bow.

"In case of my death, my will is in readiness."

The pantomime was repeated.

I felt myself growing bitter.

"I should advise you to read the papers carefully, so that if I should die you would learn of it at once, and lose none of your longed-for freedom."

Another bow.

"Casualties at sea are of frequent occurrence, you know."

Still she stood unmoved.

"I especially recommend you to read all the articles headed—*Suicide*."

Again she bowed, and my wrath exploded.

"Heavens, madame! have you nothing to say?"

"Nothing, Allan, but good-by!"

"You understand how significant a word that is?"

"I do."

"You say then, good-by?"

"I do."

With my heart throbbing wildly, my brain reeling till everything about me seemed enveloped in darkness, I held out my hand to her, saying:

"Good-by!"

She placed her hand in mine, and murmured, faintly:

"Good-by!"

Oh, Heaven! were we to part so?

I turned from her quickly. I dared not look back. I felt my fortitude giving way, and I hurried from the room.

As I reached the hall, I heard a moan, a wail, and then a cry of:

"Oh, Allan—Allan, I cannot let you go! Allan, my darling, come back to me!"

Why did I not go? Why did I stand like a statue, hearing, yet not heeding, her cry?

Because pride kept me back—pride that would not let me show to her how great was her dominion over me.

I stood for a moment, my heart racked with pain; then, with her cry ringing again in my ears, I hurried on.

I reached the street door—then love conquered pride.

Like a flash I turned, and hastened up to her room. I saw her bowed upon the table, weeping bitterly.

I sprang to her, saying:

"Oh, Ettie, my darling—my darling! I can not—"

She started up like a rocket, and faced me, proudly, scornfully, as she said:

"Allan Ingram, you have used your power over me, till I hate you! Go, and leave me, or I shall go! A man, so cruel as you, is not worthy one of the heart-pangs I have endured! You have stung me to madness, and I say—I hate you!"

For a moment I stood as if stunned; then I turned away, without a word.

I felt that I deserved this—but I could not plead with her now.

Slowly I left the room; slowly I passed through the hall.

Oh, how I longed for a word from her; but none came.

Slowly I descended the stairs, and advanced to the street door.

The "good-byes" had all been said—there was nothing to do but to go.

I opened the door, still listening for a word—a cry.

Still silence reigned.

I closed the door behind me, and shut myself out from my wife and my love, as I believed, forever.

CHAPTER XX.

WHEN SHALL WE MEET AGAIN?

"THE rain descended, and the winds blew," but the storm raging within me was fiercer still.

I drew my heavy traveling-coat close about me, and went out into the gloom, heeding it little, for it was as nothing compared with the gloom in my heart.

"Oh, that I could fly to the ends of the earth!" I wailed. "Where—where shall I go? Where—where can I hope to drown my sorrow? Where—where can I find the Lethæan draught that will deaden my misery. 'In distant lands,' my heart replies. 'I will go—yes, I will, and Ettie shall see me no more—no, never again.'"

My longing, as above expressed, was to fly to the ends of the earth; instead of doing that, however, I—walked to Boston.

And though I had said, "Ettie shall see me no more," I found myself asking again and again, as I plodded on through rain and mud:

"When shall we meet again?"

It was evening when I reached the city—a dark, cheerless, rainy evening. Tired, travel-stained, and drenched as I was, I was content to seek the shelter of an hotel, and defer my departure from all familiar places till I was rested and refreshed.

The night passed, and morning came. Then I realized, to the full, my desolation.

Alone—alone! after all my dreams of bliss, to be again alone, separated from all that was to me so dear.

"Oh, fool—fool that I am!" I cried in my misery.

"I am myself my own tormentor! I have a treasure—a priceless treasure; but, fool that I am, I am continually seeking for a flaw. Oh, Ettie, my darling, my wife, I must return to you. I cannot—oh, I cannot live alone! I will go back."

A smile came to my face at that determination, and I proceeded with my toilet cheerfully.

"Yes, I will go back," I repeated, emphatically, as I drew on one boot.

I picked up the other, and then the recollection of

Ettie's last words, "I hate you!" flashed over me. Would I not feel for ever humbled if I went back and pleaded for her love now?

"No, I cannot go!" I wailed, and I bowed my head upon the boot in my hand, and groaned aloud.

Oh, what a day of misery I endured. The rain still came down in torrents, and I remained at the hotel, only too glad of an excuse to delay my departure.

"I will wait till to-morrow," I thought.

The morrow came, cloudy, and rainy, and dreary. There was no lightening of the gloom without, no lightening of the gloom within.

I felt that I could not endure another day of this inaction; I must make a decided move in one direction or the other—I must either return to my home, or start on my proposed journey.

"A steamer sails to-day," I remarked, as I looked over the morning paper, "and I will—yes, I will go in it."

Through the rain and the sleet I fought my way till I reached the registry office.

I engaged passage, booked my name, and then hurried on, as I had little time to spare.

Oh, it all seemed like a dream. I was in a whirl, a maze; I could not realize what I was about. There was with me a keen sense of misery and desolation, but that I was leaving my wife, my home, my country—oh, that I could not realize.

I went on, mechanically. I noticed no one on my way; I took heed of nothing till I reached the pier. Then the bustle and activity aroused me; I stopped and looked around, and then a familiar voice fell on my ear.

"I was a fool to trust you. But since I have done so, I warn you to keep strict guard over your actions. Remember, you have as much at stake as I, so leave your cups alone. It would be a good idea, I think, for you to enlist in the service of the Russians or the Turks; such action might cure you of this despicable cowardice you have shown of late."

"You mean, it might rid you of a troublesome confrere," was the sullen reply.

I turned toward the speakers, amazed. Such words from Leonard! such a reply from Bostwick! What did this mean? For the first time a doubt entered my mind as to Leonard's uprightness. I thought of Bostwick's words, spoken, to be sure, when in his cups—could it be possible that Leonard was a villain?

Before I could frame a reply, the two had spied me, and were approaching.

I learned that Harry Bostwick was about to start for Europe. I communicated my intention of going also.

"At least, wait over till the next steamer," Leonard persisted, till I yielded, again only too glad of an excuse for delaying my departure.

We waited till Harry Bostwick had gone aboard, and then we turned our faces city-ward.

By this time all my former confidence in Leonard had returned—a confidence so deep that it would require more than the words I had overheard to dispel it. I even overlooked his evident anxiety to deter me from taking passage in the steamer with Harry Bostwick.

Perhaps I gave so little weight to his actions because I felt relieved and gladdened that something had occurred to detain me from going. That I had engaged passage, and had registered my name, were facts of which I thought nothing.

I soon found good reason for Leonard's anxiety to detain me, as he said:

"I have seen Beatrice."

"When?"

"Last evening. As you were absent I asked for her; to my great surprise, she received me. I offered her my hand and heart again, and, sir—she accepted me!"

"I congratulate you, my boy."

"But still I am not content. I have waited and hoped for so long, that I wish to receive my reward now."

"I understand—you desire to marry Beatrice at once. Don't—take my advice, my boy, and don't even broach the subject to her."

"Why?"

"Well, Beatrice is queer, you know, and she thinks that you ought to show some respect to the memory of your departed brother. By-the-way, Leonard, has it ever occurred to you that that might not have been Oliver we saw at the Morgue?"

He started violently, and his voice sounded strange and husky as he said:

"There can be no doubt, about it, sir. If that were not he, where is he? No one has seen him."

He looked at me questioningly. I did not think it worth while to mention that appearance in my grounds, or to go into particulars, so I replied, carelessly:

"No. But even if we have made a mistake—even if he is alive, it matters nothing, for it cannot concern Beatrice at all."

"Of course not. Now, sir, in spite of your kind advice, I shall urge Beatrice to marry me at once. I may be obliged—in fact, I know that I shall be obliged to go abroad soon, and I cannot wait for her till I return. Will you consent to a speedy marriage?"

"With all my heart, Leonard. But I fear—however, try, my boy, try. 'Nothing ventured, nothing won,' you know."

"And in case I succeed?"

"Write to me at once, and I will return and make all necessary arrangements."

I spoke heartily, hoping that Beatrice would consent, for then I would be obliged to return—then I could enter my house boldly, feeling that circumstances warranted this retraction of my threat of going abroad, and then Ettie and I might become entirely reconciled.

So, rejoicing that I had met Leonard, and favoring his suit because it might be the means of mending my broken happiness, I continued, heartily:

"I am called—let me see, I am called to New York on important business"—I quite forgot the fact that I had just been on the point of starting for Europe. "Write to me there, Leonard, if you succeed, and I will return home immediately."

The gloom within me seemed to be lightening at last; that without remained as deep and drear.

Hope whispered to me again, and almost cheerfully I boarded the evening train for the sound steamer.

How it rained! I sat in one corner of the dimly-lighted car, my great-coat drawn close about me and up around my ears, my large hat pulled down over my face. Now I gave heed to the din made by the rain, the wind, and the moving train; now I was lost in my reflections.

I watched the passengers in a mechanical sort of a way, as they entered or departed.

The train stopped and moved on, and I felt not the least desire to know where we were.

Again it stopped; I saw passenger after passenger leave the car, still I sat unheeding. I was not aroused till I discovered that I was the only one left. It did not seem possible that we had reached the boat; however, I arose to go and ascertain.

No, we had not reached the boat, as I learned from the crowd congregated without.

We had only accomplished one-third the distance, but the engine had become disabled, and we could proceed no further till another one was procured.

"An hour's delay, at least," said one.

Many left the spot to seek shelter for the night in the village close at hand; others re-entered the cars to wait there till they could go on, and I was left almost alone as I tried to decide what I would do.

The rain beating furiously upon me, warned me to decide quickly.

"I'll try to gain shelter hereabout," I said, at length, turning in the direction of the lights that faintly glimmered through the storm and the darkness.

At that same instant I felt a soft, gentle touch upon my arm, and I heard a low, sweet, tremulous voice say:

"Oh, sir, I am obliged to appeal to some one for aid—I do not know where I am. Can you tell me?"

I turned quickly, uttering an exclamation of surprise as I made out a female form beside me—a slender, delicate form, that seemed to be shrinking from the driving rain, and the violent wind.

A modest, timid voice—the hand on my arm was small, and delicately gloved—even in the darkness I could discern the bearing of a lady.

Instantly, my heart filled with sympathy for her in her evident distress.

"Were you on board the train, madame," I asked, deferentially, as I tried to see her face—but it was covered with a heavy veil, which she did not offer to raise.

"Yes, Oh, this delay is so unfortunate!" she moaned, taking the hand from my arm, and raising it with a gesture of agony. "I have an urgent errand before me—it is a case of life and death—and I cannot wait. If you will tell me where I am—perhaps my destination is not far off."

It was palpable that desperation, and the urgency of her situation, forced her to speak.

Her tones were almost inaudible; I could only just hear her words above the roaring of the elements.

"You are unprotected against this storm, madame," I said, kindly. "Allow me to conduct you to some place of shelter, and then I will endeavor to ascertain where we are."

"Oh, I have no time for delay!" she moaned. "I do not care for the storm—I do not care for anything only to go to him! Oh, he may die while I stand here waiting! I must go on, at once."

"Poor thing," I said to myself. "Some one she loves is in danger of death. I cannot leave her in this storm, and unprotected as she is."

"Pray, madame," I added, aloud—how strangely my voice sounded, as it was half-drowned by the roaring about me, and half-muffled, as it came from behind my high coat collar—"allow me to assist you. We are near some village I believe. I will make inquiries for you. You, alone as you are, might meet with very little courtesy in such a place as this."

I moved on, and she followed.

"Quite an adventure," I thought, "and bordering on the romantic, too." What would Ettie say if she could see me now?

Guided by the faintly glimmering lights, we reached what proved to be a way-side inn.

Rough, uncouth men were hanging about the door, and lounging about in the bar-room. I saw that my companion shrank back, as if afraid to proceed further.

"Do not fear, madame," I said, reassuringly; "I will protect you."

She looked up at me, as if she wished to satisfy herself that I was worthy of her trust.

She could not see my face, for coat and hat almost met. I was as well concealed from her view as she was from mine, with her long cloak, and her heavy veil.

Still, I felt that she was a lady, and she evidently determined that I was a gentleman, for she murmured, gratefully:

"You are very kind, sir. I am in deep distress, and all alone, and I cannot do less than accept your offer of assistance."

I left her standing on the covered platform, as I went to make inquiry.

"We are at Cohasset," I said, as I returned to her.

"Thank God!" she exclaimed. "This is my destination. Perhaps I have not far to go now."

She turned from me, then paused as if dismayed, as she peered out into the darkness.

I heard her whisper:

"Oh, it is a fearful night, and if I should lose my way! But I must not think of that—I must be brave. I must not wait longer, for he may be dying. Oh, why did I let him go from me?"

She started on, but I detained her.

"Madame," I said, "allow me to attend you. It is not safe for you to go alone. Have you far to go?"

"I do not know," she moaned. "The directions I received are very indefinite. I wish to find the house of Nelson James."

"I will inquire again," I returned. "James Nelson, you say?"

"No—no; Nelson James."

I accosted the first lounge I met.

"Can you direct me to the house of one James Nelson?"

"Is it James Nelson, or Nelson James you mean, sir?"

"James Nelson—is it not, madame?"

"No; it is Nelson James."

"Well, sir, Nelson James, he lives five miles beyant this, sir."

I heard a moan from the veiled lady.

I confess that my heart sank. Five miles in this storm and darkness.

"Yes, sir, five mile, sir, and as bad and crooked a five mile as you'd wish to find, sir. You start down this here road, sir, and keep on it till you come to a cross-road. Turn to your left, then, sir, and keep on that till you come to another cross-road; turn to your right then, and keep on that till you come to

"Yes—yes," I interrupted, impatiently. "I thank you for your information. Will you undertake this journey to-night, madame," I asked of her.

"Oh, I must—I must!" she wailed. "I dare not wait till morning. But five miles," she added, shuddering. "How can I walk five miles on such a night as this?"

"Of course, that is out of the question, madame. If you will go, I will attend you."

"Oh, it is too much, sir. And you are a stranger

"But a gentleman, I hope, madame; and you, being a lady, can fully understand the motive that prompts me to assist you."

She bowed, and murmured:

"I thankfully accept your offer."

It was almost an hour before we were started on our journey. In that time I had succeeded in obtaining a dilapidated buggy, and a superannuated horse. As I took up the reins, the thought returned to my mind:

"What would Ettie say if she could see me now?" We rode on in silence.

She offered no explanation of her errand, and of course I would not intrude upon her sorrow.

I pitied her deeply, and yet I felt annoyed that it had fallen to my lot to be her cavalier.

How it would end I dared not think. I could not hope to find this distant house with the directions I had received; but I could do nothing else than trust to fate, and drive on haphazard.

With every rod of the journey, I felt myself growing more and more impatient. The horse crept along, the rain beat in upon us, the wind blew so violently that it threatened to overturn the rickety vehicle, and the darkness was so deep that I could scarcely see my own hands.

I thought of Ettie in her comfortable home, and contrasted it with my situation. Whose fault was it? mine, to be sure; and yet I cast lowering looks upon the lady at my side, and anathematized her.

Once as I looked at her, I saw she was swaying as if faint.

"Are you ill, madame?" I asked, not in alarm, but in irritation.

"I believe I—"

Her words were choked off as the horse came to a sudden stop, and she was thrown forward. But for my support, she would have fallen from the vehicle.

As I put my arm about her and drew her back, her head fell helplessly upon my shoulder.

"She has fainted!" I exclaimed, impatiently.

Then the thought came to me:

"What would Ettie say, if she could see me now?" I was about to lift her veil, but she prevented me by starting up quickly, saying faintly:

"I feel better."

She raised her hands to her head in a dazed way, and in doing so, she lost her hold on something that fell to the floor of the buggy.

I stooped, and picked it up, at the same time I realized that the horse was standing still. I thrust the article quickly into my pocket, and sprang out to see what was the matter.

Nothing but stubbornness on the part of the animal. For full fifteen minutes I stood in the pelting rain, trying to induce it to move on. At last I succeeded, and then I re-entered the buggy drenched with the rain, benumbed with the cold, and breathing bitter invectives against the whole feminine sex.

We continued the journey in silence. After hours of this torture we, to my amazement, came to a house that proved to be the one for which we were in search.

I helped the veiled lady out, and without waiting to listen to the profuse thanks, without taking any note of the house and its surroundings, I started on the return, vowing solemnly that never again would I offer myself as cavalier to any female, however distressed she might be.

It was long after midnight when I again came to the wayside inn.

A room had been put in readiness for me, and I hastened to it at once.

Hurriedly I divested myself of my dripping great

coat, and flung it upon a chair. Something fell from the pocket to the floor; as I heard the sound I remembered that instead of returning the lady's property to her, I had pocketed it.

"Stupidity!" I exclaimed, as I went to pick it up.

"My God!" I exclaimed, as I held it in my hand. Could I believe my eyes? I looked, and looked again. No, there was no doubt—there was no room for a mistake; it was my wife's pocketbook.

CHAPTER XXI.

"GONE WITH A HANDSOMER MAN."

My wife's pocketbook!

I held it in my hand, and looked at it as at a thing of horror.

My wife's pocketbook!

Great heavens!—then my evening's adventure had been with her!—then I had put myself to all this trouble—gone through rain, and mud, and darkness, to enable her to join one she loved!

I myself, her much-wronged and injured husband, had actually helped her in her unfaithfulness.

I had called myself "fool," "dolt," heretofore; there seemed to be no word in my vocabulary sufficiently strong to be used on the present occasion, for I had not only helped her, but I had gone to such great trouble to do it.

I held the pocketbook—the innocent means of this terrible discovery—gingerly between my fingers; it was far worse than handling a scorpion, for it had stung me more deeply.

I retreated to the chair before the fire, and for some time I sat there, thinking of this unexpected overthrow of all my hopes.

I caught a glimpse of myself in the small looking-glass that hung on the opposite wall; a more forlorn picture it has never been my misfortune to behold.

A man seated in the most disconsolate attitude, his legs stretched out before him to their fullest length, his head bent upon his breast, his hair, damp and limp, matted upon his forehead, his face pale, his nose a vivid red from exposure to the keen, biting November wind, and his eyes full of despair, and fixed steadily upon a purse of Russia leather, the gold clasp of which bore the name of Ingram.

I looked quickly away from this unpleasant reflection of myself, and sighed: then, mechanically, I opened the pocket-book.

What I saw was so characteristic of Ettie; bills thrust here and there without any attempt at precision or order, and intermingled with bits of poetry, cards, scraps of paper, receipts, etc.

It made me feel tender to see this; her little faults had been so dear to me, and in thinking of them I forgot my misery.

Almost reverently I took out bit after bit. I came to one, a piece of paper, soiled and redolent of tobacco.

Surprised, I unfolded it; and my eyes rested on the following:

"DEAR MADAME: He was brunged to my place putty well hurted, hez calling fur his wife so pious I send fur you—it's the only addres I can find on lam so I s'pose your the one. Cum soon, bekas hez putty well hurted."

"NELSON JAMES
"at Cohasset."

I read it over a second, and a third time. It was an ambiguous document, truly. At the third reading, I was as much in a maze as the first.

"In the absence of names the missive forms a puzzle," I said, as I turned it over and over, and helplessly gazed upon it. "Dear madame," that might refer to any one; but of course it is Ettie, as the note was in her possession, and as she has gone in answer to it. "He"—that is rather indefinite; but I'll learn who he is."

My wrath was kindling, and I arose and paced the room angrily as I continued:

"Armed with these proofs," I had the pocket-book in one hand, the soiled slip of paper in the other—"I will confront them, and stagger them. I'll learn who this hero is who is so dear to Ettie that she can, for his sake, endure such a trial as last night's adventure must have been. I'll face them both when the day breaks, and then—good-by forever, Ettie—good-by forever, hope! I'll face them, and then I'll turn resolutely to my barren, loveless future."

In my pacing to and fro, and my gesticulating, the slip of paper fell from my hand and fluttered into the fire.

"It matters not," I muttered, as I watched the flames consume it. "Every word is indelibly stamped on my memory. Let me see; was it James Nelson, or Nelson James? I confused the two last night, but now I remember well—it is James Nelson."

There was no sleep for me that night; I paced, and brooded, and moaned, in my misery, till the grey dawn came.

I waited impatiently as the moments passed, listening eagerly for the first sound of life in this wayside inn.

At last the morning was at hand, and I descended and presented myself before mine host.

He started upon beholding me. I knew that my face was haggard, my eyes hollow and bloodshot.

He looked upon me anxiously, fearfully, as I made a peremptory request for a conveyance.

In timid, hurried tone, he informed me that the dilapidated buggy and the superannuated horse that I had had on the previous evening, were at my disposal again.

I was obliged to accept that offer, and I started off on my five-mile ride, feeling convinced that as soon as I was out of sight the landlord would muster the whole force of servants at the inn and search the

room I had occupied for the body of my victim. I am sure he deemed me nothing less than a murderer, judging from the anxious, fearful glances he had cast upon me.

A climax was at hand, I felt, and I endeavored to nerve myself to meet it heroically. Away all love, and mercy, and weakness! Come, hate, and dignity, and firmness!

I drove along, sitting as straight as a statue, as frigid as an iceberg.

There was no rain, but the sky was still lowering, and the wind moaned fitfully through the trees, seeming like the echo of the dirge that my heart was chanting.

I gave heed to it till I came to the first cross-road.

"To the right, or to the left?" I queried.

I could not remember in which direction I had turned on the previous night. I had driven hap-hazard then, and I would have to do the same now.

I turned to the right.

The horse crept on and on, till I had been riding nearly two hours. Then I made inquiry, and learned that I was on the right track, for the home of James Nelson was not far off.

Of course, I had no landmarks to guide me, as all had been shrouded in deepest darkness on the previous night; and when I alighted at the door of James Nelson's house, I was positive that it was the place to which I had brought Ettie.

A tumble-down, isolated abode, truly; five miles back from the railroad, and out of sight of any other dwelling.

"A romantic spot," I thought, as my eyes roved over the shutterless windows, in some of which old rags took the place of window-panes.

I knocked upon the door, sharply.

"Now, let me be calm," I muttered, as I waited for the response, "that my words may have full effect. Let me be calm and dignified—an injured man, not a broken-hearted lover."

The door was opened by a vigorous hand so quickly, so suddenly, that it was several moments before I quite comprehended the fact; then I became aware that I was confronting a female of very stout proportions, arrayed in a green gingham gown, that formed a marked contrast to her florid face.

She looked at me, questioningly.

I looked at her, helplessly.

For whom should I ask? Of course I would not mention my wife's name, and the name of her hero was unknown to me. I had not thought of this before.

Silence for a moment, and then a loud, rasping voice broke it.

"P'raps you'll call again when you know what you want."

"I beg your pardon," I made haste to say. "I wish to learn if—I scarcely know how to—the fact is, I—I—in a word, madame," I added, desperately, as I realized that I was making no headway at all, "is this James Nelson?"

"Do I look as if I was?" she asked, indignantly, her florid face taking a deeper hue.

"Again I beg your pardon, madame. I meant to ask if this is the house of James Nelson?"

"Yes, sir," she replied, curtly, viewing me with evident distrust and displeasure.

"I believe—in fact, I know that a—a person—a gentleman is lying ill here, and—"

"He's gone," was the laconic interruption.

"Gone!" I exclaimed. "When—"

"About an hour ago."

"And the lady—there was a lady—she—"

"She's gone, too."

"Gone!" I exclaimed again. "When—"

"About an hour ago."

"Did they go together?"

"They did."

"Where?—do you know where?"

"I do."

"Then tell me! Quick—quick!" I cried, forgetting all my resolutions to be firm at this unexpected information.

"See here, mister," and Mrs. James Nelson placed her large hands on her large hips, and tossed her head angrily. "I don't know what you come here asking such questions for, but I do know that I ain't a-going to answer 'em. I call it downright impudence, I do! If people can't come and go out of my house without having strangers and busy-bodies poking around after 'em, I think it's a pity—I do. That's all I have to say, so good morning to you," and the door was closed as quickly as it had been opened.

I sighed, and turned sadly away.

"It must be so," I muttered, as I re-entered the buggy. "Of course she would not remain in such a place as this. She is gone from me forever. I will think of her no more. I will return to the house I have called home; I will give my ward to Leonard, and thus settle her future; and then I will turn the key on all my hopes and dreams of happiness, and go to far-off lands. There shall be no more longing—no more looking back—it shall be; on—on to my cheerless future."

Wretched as I was the horse's pace just suited me; I allowed him to creep along unmolested, while I sat brooding over my bitter sorrow.

Gone—gone! The words rang and rang in my ears like the elated mocking of fiends.

Gone—gone! What a world of desolation those monosyllables pictured to me!

Gone—gone! As they echoed and re-echoed they seemed like sharp-pointed bars trying to pierce the armor of hate I had girt about me; and to open the well springs of love and agony in my heart.

I reached the wayside inn again, paid my dues to the now smiling landlord, and then started on the return to my home.

As I came in its vicinity, and beheld the scenes so

endeared to me—the shrine in which I had placed my love, and at which I had worshiped, though in secret—my pulses quickened, my heart beat high, and that sweet flatterer, Hope, dared to whisper to me again.

It reminded me of a time when I had endured just such misery as was mine now, as I had deemed my Ettie false; and how I had found that my fears had been unfounded.

Might it not be so again? Might I not find again that I had been the victim of some mistake?

My home, that reared itself so majestically above the naked trees, might still contain my idol.

With that hope in my heart, I entered the house eagerly.

I stepped into the hall, but instantly the damp of disappointment chilled me. All was quiet as the tomb.

It seemed like some deserted place; it seemed as if I had been absent years instead of days, and that I had returned to find all changed.

No; there was one thing just as I had left it. As I looked down the long hall, I saw hanging on a stand by the rear door, that cloak and hat.

It appeared like some dark, weird specter, warning me of evil; I turned quickly from it, and hastened to my library.

As I thought, a startled exclamation caused me to look up.

It had come from Beatrice, who was standing before the grate fire.

She met my gaze with a look of the deepest surprise.

"A flattering welcome," I said, bitterly, as I jerked off my great coat.

She made no reply, but stood still as if transfixed with amazement.

"Where's Ettie?" I asked, abruptly.

"Ettie!" she exclaimed. "Why, guardy, Ettie left here yesterday to go to you."

I curled my lip scornfully at this proof of my wife's duplicity. So, she had blinded Beatrice by saying that she was going to me.

"Indeed," I said. "How did she happen to know where I was?"

"A note came, guardy—a note saying that you were lying, badly injured, at the house of—"

I curled my lip still more scornfully.

She added, quickly:

"I saw the note, and read it, too, guardy. And Ettie—oh, she was in such deep distress! She started at once, without thinking of the severe storm, and the coming darkness. Is it not very strange?" she asked, anxiously.

"No," I replied, shortly, and I took that pocket-book from my pocket, placed it upon the table, and then looked meaningly at her.

"You have seen her?" she asked, as her eyes rested upon it.

"Yes," I replied, "I have seen her—and for the last time."

I did not choose to go into particulars; it was sufficient for Beatrice to know that Ettie and I were parted.

"Oh, guardy," she began.

"Pray, spare me your sympathies," I interrupted, coldly. "It is my wish that you do not broach this subject at all—not even to me."

"But, guardy, let me speak. You have been hasty. Ettie is not—"

I interrupted her by an imperious wave of the hand.

"If you please, Beatrice, be good enough to allow me to manage my own affairs."

At this rebuff, she retreated, saying proudly:

"Very well, sir, since you will have it so."

She left me then—left me to my gloomy thoughts.

Hope's whisperings had again been idle flatteries; the wretched certainty stared me in the face—Ettie was gone.

I sat by the table, picturing to myself the future that was to be mine, and trying to fortify my heart against tender recollection; but in vain. The days that had been would rise up to pain me by their contrast to the dark present.

I caught up a paper at hand, determined to divert my thoughts.

It was the morning *Herald*. I read column after column, without catching the meaning of a single paragraph, for the phantom of misery and despair would intrude and distract my attention.

Then I began to read aloud:

"Departure of the *Parthia*. The Cunard steamship, *Parthia*, left this port yesterday noon, for Liverpool, with forty-five cabin, and one-hundred-and-fifty steerage passengers, and a full cargo of domestic produce. The following is a list of the cabin passengers:

Still I did not realize what I was reading. I went on, as if it had been a study set before me, and read the names that were appended—one after another, till I came to Harry Bostwick, and next to that was Allan Ingram.

There I stopped; and, strangely enough, my thoughts wandered out to that cloak and hat hanging in the hall, and the evil that it had seemed to foretell assumed a more tangible form.

The following query entered my mind: if I were unwilling to explain how it was that my name was on the list of passengers, bound for Europe, while I was still in my home, making arrangements for an actual departure, could not a pretty sad case be made out against me?

CHAPTER XXII.

AN UNEXPECTED REVELATION.

AUNT Phoebe had departed.

I uttered a hearty "Thank God!" when I heard of it.

Peter gave me the particulars:

"I see her sitting in the breakfast-room, this morning, reading the paper, sir, when all of a sudden she jumps up, saying: 'my sakes!' just as if she'd seen something that had upset her. She bundled right off up stairs, sir, and in less than five minutes she was down again with her bonnet and shawl on, and she says to me, says she: 'Peter, I'm a-going. My things is packed, and I'll send for them when I get ready. Say good-by to Miss Beatrice for me, because I ain't had no chance of seeing her this morning.' Then she went off like a streak, sir."

I fancied that I understood the matter perfectly. Of course, Ettie had told Aunt Phoebe, as she had told Beatrice, that the note she had received referred to me; and that she was going to me. Aunt Phoebe had then seen my name in the paper in the list of passengers on the *Parthia*, and that had suggested to her that all was not as it had been represented, and she had set out immediately to investigate the affair for herself.

"It is well," I said to myself. "She will go to Cohasset, she will learn, as I did, that Ettie is gone, and I will be spared a painful explanation. I hope she'll have the good sense to go right to her home, and not feel it to be her duty to come and condole with me. The only relief that my exile promises is that I shall never see her sharp eyes and wizen face, nor hear her cackling again."

The dinner-bell rang.

Oh, what a harsh, hollow sound it gave! It seemed more like the summons to a spectral feast in some deserted place, than to a well-cooked dinner in a private house.

I groaned aloud. But that was not adhering to my resolution, so I started up abruptly, and repaired to the dining-room.

Beatrice was there before me. We looked at each other, and sighed.

The room was brilliantly lighted, a fire glowed and crackled in the grate, the table was covered with a glittering array of silver-ware and glass, but yet, how gloomy, how dismal it all seemed! And the absence of one form, one face, made all this difference.

We seated ourselves, and began the mockery of eating.

The first mouthful threatened to choke me and I saw that Beatrice' endeavor to eat was as vain as mine.

"A little cheerful conversation," I thought, "may facilitate matters. I must not be selfish, and cloud my ward's happiness with my sorrows."

I said aloud, trying to speak in a sly, playful way.

"My dear Beatrice, shall it be a public or a private affair? You have accepted the man of my choice, so I shall allow you to follow your own sweet will in all the details—"

"Please don't speak of it now, guardy," she interrupted, in husky, tremulous tones.

Silence fell upon us again.

I could not eat. I cast a hurried glance over at Beatrice, to see how she was succeeding now—not at all; she sat there toying with her fork, and looking as mournful as a picture of grief.

"This will not do," I muttered, and I turned over subject after subject for conversation in my mind, but not one seemed calculated to promote cheerfulness.

I couldn't eat—I couldn't talk. Beatrice' reflections must have been like mine, for precisely at the same instant we sighed, laid down our knives and forks, and arose from the table. We stood facing each other in melancholy silence for a moment, then Beatrice hurried from the room.

"If this is a forerunner of the days to come," I said, wearily, "the sooner the end comes, the better. Oh, Ettie—Ettie—"

There! I was forgetting my resolutions again.

I walked quickly out into the hall—that, too, seemed filled with shadows, the ghosts of my dead hopes; they seemed to be peering at me from every side.

"I cannot endure this," I moaned. "I must go away at once."

I hurried to the evening-room, hoping to find Beatrice there, so that I could speak to her about my plans.

Yes, she was there, standing before the fire, her arms resting upon the mantel, her head bowed upon them.

The misery tugging at my heartstrings made me desperate. I broached the subject abruptly:

"Beatrice, I am going abroad."

She turned her white face to me; there was a look of dread in her eyes, but she said, quietly:

"When?"

"At once. I cannot remain here now. But, before I go I must see you settled. You have accepted Leonard—why not—"

She turned suddenly from me, and bowed her head upon her arms again, shuddering visibly.

"Why, Beatrice, what does this mean?"

She did not reply for several moments; then, facing me, she said, hurriedly:

"Yes, I have accepted Leonard. You wish me to marry him at once. Very well, guardy, I will."

I had not expected such instant compliance. I looked at her in surprise.

She smiled bitterly, as she added:

"You will find me very meek, very obedient, now, guardy. Arrange everything to suit yourself, and I will be satisfied."

"Well! This is strange for you, Beatrice! I hope, my dear, you don't feel as if you were forced to this."

"No," she said, sharply. "I should think you would know from experience that that is a thing impossible to do. I am unhappy, dissatisfied—I want a change—I want to forget, if I can, all the past."

Before I could express my astonishment at her incomprehensible words, she had left me.

"Well!" I exclaimed. "It must be conceded that my lot has fallen among strange women. What is wrong there, I wonder?"

The coming of Leonard put an end to my queries. He was surprised to see me, of course. After a brief explanation of affairs, we settled ourselves to a discussion of his marriage to Beatrice.

It was decided that it should be a private affair, that it should take place on the coming Wednesday evening at the church, and that we—Leonard, Beatrice, and I—would then depart at once for Europe.

Leonard suggested, and I agreed. I was too unhappy to stir myself much about the matter.

Beatrice agreed to it all, also. She both surprised and pained me by her strange passiveness.

I spent the few intervening days in making preparations for a lengthy stay abroad. How I lived through them I cannot now imagine!

The wedding-day came to hand, at last, and I welcomed it gladly. It would part me from old scenes, and familiar places, but it would also release me from the poignant misery that was mine.

It dawned bright and clear. I looked out upon the blue and cloudless sky, upon nature in her russet garb that was now brightened by the golden sunlight, and it brought to mind the happy days of a year ago, when Ettie and I had been lovers; and such a longing to go to the village from whence she had come, and visit the spots endeared to me from association with her, took possession of me, that I could not combat it.

I determined to indulge myself thus far on this, my last day in my native land.

I told Beatrice that I would return in time to conduct her to the church, and then I started.

The hours I spent in the vicinity of Ettie's home were hours of torture. By the time I turned my face homeward, I had succeeded in lacerating my heart so that I could have cried out in my agony.

I reached my home in due course of time, and I hurried up to my rooms, to prepare myself for the evening's event.

"A sorry wedding this," I commented, as, my toilet completed, I stepped to the hall to ring for Peter. "Beatrice looks as if she were going to her execution instead of her bridal, and I feel as if I were doing her gross injury in allowing it to go on. However—" and I pulled the bell fiercely.

Peter came in answer to the ring.

"Tell Miss Ghent that I am waiting for her in the evening-room."

I descended, and began to pace restlessly as I waited.

Peter appeared at the door.

I stopped short at sight of his startled face.

"Miss—Miss Ghent, sir, is—is—"

"Ill?" I asked, impatiently.

"No, sir—gone!"

"What!"

"She's gone, sir; there ain't no sign of her anywhere."

"Oh, nonsense!" I exclaimed, brushing by him, and hastening up stairs to her rooms.

It was as Peter had said—she was gone. We searched the house, but in vain. Peter peeped beneath sofas and chairs, and even looked into the vases on the several mantels.

After half an hour's thorough searching I found myself again in the evening-room, in anything but a tranquil state of mind.

"I thought it promised too well," I muttered, impatiently. "These women! how very aggravating and uncertain they are!"

Suddenly I remembered the church, the minister, and the bridegroom; and in less time than it takes to record it I had donned my cloak and hat, and was hastening along the street churchward.

"Yes, he's here, anxiously waiting and wondering!" I exclaimed, as I saw a carriage before the church door.

I entered the vestibule, from which doors opened into lobbies on either side.

At the same moment, Leonard's voice, harsh and unpleasant, fell on my ear.

"I can't attend to you now, Mr. Josephs."

I looked in through the half open door of the lobby from whence the voice came, and I saw Leonard, flushed and angry, and opposite to him was Uncle Waldon, perfectly calm and self-possessed.

Mr. Josephs! By that name, then, Leonard knew him.

How I wished that I could whisper a warning word to him, for he was certainly showing himself to a great disadvantage before his rich uncle, whose favor had been so much desired by both of the boys.

I fairly trembled for him as I listened to his angry words.

"You must have the instincts of a brute to come at such a time as this! I've requested you to go, and wait and do your dunning at a more fitting opportunity; since you have not heeded me, I shall feel justified in ejecting you forcibly."

"Not so fast, my young friend. It takes two to play at that game, you know. I'm not going to leave till you have given me some proof that you are not so dishonest as I fear you are."

"I tell you I cannot, and will not attend to you now. To-morrow—"

"Then you'll be gone. I know your intentions, my fine friend—marriage, an immediate departure, and no thought of the thousands I have advanced to you."

"Take care, you may say too much, and even your grey hairs won't protect you. Will you go?"

"No!"

"But I say you shall!"

Horried at this unexpected revelation of Leonard's

character, I had withdrawn into a corner of the vestibule where I could hear without being seen. At this juncture I heard a sound as of scuffling feet.

"I'm afraid you're not strong enough, my honest friend," said Uncle Waldon.

Breathlessly Leonard returned:

"If I'm not I can obtain help from outside. Go you shall."

"Do you not know that unpleasant consequences may accrue from such a course as this?"

"Bah! There is no law to uphold a man for interfering as you are."

"It alters the case materially when it is considered that you are an absconding debtor."

"You do not know that I am that—it is only a devilish surmise of yours. I ask you for the last time, will you go? Here it is—why, bless me, it is past the hour appointed! They may arrive at any moment now! This is a nice predicament for my bride to find me in. Heavens, man, will you go? Do you not see that you are spoiling your only chances for recovering your money by remaining here! If she comes, sees you and hears you, will she marry me? No! Then how am I ever going to repay you?"

"I'll tell you what I'll do, young man. I'll go, if you will sit down and write—I have a paper and pen with me; I came prepared—sit down and write it out in full; that as soon as you get control of this lady's money, you will cancel your indebtedness to me. That was the agreement, but I want it in writing."

Imagine my horror! Could this be the Leonard whom I had trusted so implicitly?

"Fool! it can't be done now. I'll see you in the morning; name any place, any time, and I'll meet you. Hush! I hear an approaching carriage. They are coming! And, ten to one, the clergy in the vestry yonder have heard every word we have said."

"For the lady's sake, I hope they have; and also that they will refuse to marry her to such a scoundrel as you are."

"By Heavens, you'll answer for that! It's all I can do to keep my hands off you now. Go—get out of my sight, or you'll regret it!"

"Not one step—"

"By thunder, you shall! I'll call the police—"

"And I'll call the clergy!"

"Out—out, I say!" and again I heard the sound of scuffling feet. "By Heavens, I'll help you to go, and with no gentle hand, either!"

More scuffling, then suddenly the door of the lobby was pushed open violently, and Uncle Waldon was forced forward by the irate Leonard, who held him by the coat-collar, and administered a kick at every step or two.

He thrust him out into the street, and I drew further into the corner, hoping that he would not see me as he returned to the lobby.

He did not, and I hastily made my exit from the church, having no compunction about leaving him to extricate himself as best he could from his embarrassing position.

I hurried home, and there in the solitude of my library I gave free vent to my wrath and my indignation, and heartily thanked God that Beatrice had escaped the snare of the fowler.

If only I could learn where she was, I felt that I would be almost happy. If only I knew—

Just then I caught sight of an envelope lying upon my table, and addressed to me.

Yes, it was from Beatrice. It had come by mail, and it was post-marked Boston. I opened it and read it eagerly:

"DEAR GUARDY: At the last moment my heart fails me; I do not love Leonard Waldon, and I cannot marry him. I feel that I cannot face you both and tell you this now, at this late hour, so I leave in this way. Your loving

"BEATRICE."

Before I had time to comment upon these few words, Leonard was announced.

I went to receive him, my heart filled with loathing and contempt.

I could scarcely reconcile the smooth, sleek-looking person I saw before me, with the flushed, angry one I had seen in the church lobby.

He arose as I entered, saying, anxiously:

"What has happened? Is Beatrice ill?"

I closed the door behind me, and turned to pour the vials of my wrath upon his head.

Before I could say a word, the door was opened again; turning, I saw Uncle Waldon standing there. Leonard started, his face flushed hotly, and his eyes fairly blazed. Clenching his fists, he took a step forward, muttering fiercely:

"That Josephs again!"

"Pray be calm," said Uncle Waldon, raising his hand imperiously. "Friend Ingram, be kind enough to introduce me to this person."

With intense satisfaction, I complied:

"Leonard, this is your uncle, George Waldon."

Every drop of blood receded from Leonard's face, leaving it of a ghastly hue; his eyes seemed to be starting out of their sockets; he sank helplessly into a chair, exclaiming, in a faltering voice:

"Great heavens! My uncle, and I kicked him!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHERE IS OLIVER WALDON?

UNCLE WALDON stood erect and stern, and gazed upon his crestfallen nephew.

Something between a sneer and a smile came to his face as he, at length, turned to me, saying:

"Ingram, this is your model, I believe. I can't say that I admire your taste."

What could I say? I was indignant and angered at Leonard, but I was also exceedingly uneasy in the

presence of my usually genial but now coldly courteous friend, for as I looked at him, I could but think of that cloak and hat hanging on the stand in the hall.

I cast a wrathful glance upon Leonard, and then I turned to his uncle.

He intercepted my intention to speak.

"Gentlemen," he began, in a cold, clear voice, speaking as gravely as if he were addressing an assemblage, "(I will not call you friends, for I cannot consider you as such under existing circumstances.) As I have already remarked, gentlemen—" He paused for a moment, as if to make his next words the more effective; then he added: "Where is Oliver Waldon?"

He looked keenly at Leonard, who fidgeted in his chair, and became, if possible, paler than before.

"Where is Oliver Waldon?" he repeated, in a higher key, his gaze still fixed upon his nephew, who at length blustered:

"Am I my brother's keeper?"

"Where, I say again—where is Oliver Waldon?" persisted the old gentleman, in a still higher key, turning this time upon me.

I confess that my uneasiness deepened beneath his piercing gaze, and it was not in the heartiest of tones that I made reply.

"To the best of my knowledge, friend Waldon—"

He interrupted me by a wave of the hand.

"Not friend, if you please. We are strangers, enemies, if you will, but not friends till this mystery is explained."

"You asked me about Oliver," I said, choking down my indignation at his suspicions of me. "As I was about to say, to the best of my knowledge, he is dead and buried."

"You firmly believe that?"

"No, I have my doubts."

"And you," turning to Leonard, "do you believe that Oliver is dead?"

"To be sure I do. Mr. Ingram was with me at the morgue—"

"That was not Oliver," interrupted the old gentleman.

"Who was it, then?" blustered Leonard.

"I do not know who it was, but I do know that it was not Oliver, for, gentlemen," looking sharply from one to the other, "Oliver was with me on that very day on which you flattered yourselves that you had consigned him to his grave."

Leonard started to his feet, pale and trembling.

I maintained my ground, but with difficulty.

"Let me go back a little," continued Uncle Waldon, in his clear tones. "Let me go back to the day of my trial. You probably remember that day, Ingram."

"Perfectly," I said, curtly.

"You left me with a fainting woman in my arms. I succeeded in restoring her to consciousness, and mutual confidences followed. Of course you know who the lady was?"

"Certainly," I said.

"She, in a way best known to herself, had discovered that Oliver was in sore trouble of some kind, that he was maligned by you and others. Her sympathies were aroused, and she had determined to do all she could to help him. Her opinion of him was so widely different from yours, Ingram, that it set me to thinking, the result of which was that I concluded to condemn no one unjustly. I would not believe Leonard a saint, and Oliver a sinner, because you regarded them; neither would I believe that Oliver was the saint, because that was another's view; but I would learn that truth for myself. Hence my desire to remain incog."

He looked at me.

I had nothing to say, so I simply bowed.

He looked at Leonard, who really appeared like one who would, if he could, have snatched up his hat and run.

"You," he said, so sharply that he seemed to nail Leonard to the spot at which his word had found him, "you made my acquaintance through Mr. Isaacs, a money-lender, whom I had called upon, and whose co-operation I had gained. He represented me as Mr. Josephs, a man of means, who would advance to you the money you required. In that way I have discovered that you are not the saint that Mr. Ingram believed you to be."

I essayed to interrupt him to tell that my faith was shaken, at last—that I had been a witness to that meeting in the church-lobby; but the old gentleman would give me no opportunity.

He went on:

"In the same way I learned that Oliver, while he has his faults, is still the frank, generous, open-hearted boy I've always believed him to be. You remember that note, Ingram, that I found on the table in his office? Well, I loaned him the money he wanted, taking his diamonds as security—not such security as you gave me, young man."

Leonard's perturbation was almost painful to behold at that juncture; he looked quickly about as if he would make his escape from the room. His face cleared, and he sighed with relief, as his uncle continued:

"That money seemed to lift a load from Oliver's heart, for, as he told me, it settled his indebtedness to a lady; still he appeared to be very unhappy. I saw that he was suffering severely, both mentally and physically. I tried to win his confidence, I at last succeeded in part. He told me of a hopeless love. Poor fellow! how I pitied him."

I felt my blood tingling. Hopeless love! Of course it was his love for Ettie.

Uncle Waldon saw my emotion, and he said:

"The jealous are always unreasonable. I fear, Ingram, that your jealousy has carried you to greater lengths than that. But to continue: he could not con-

hide in me altogether, because of a vow he had made; but he told me a part of his sorrow before he became ill—very ill, during which time he was under my care. It was in the first days of his convalescence that I came here; the day of your *soiree*, Ingram—the day on which you had been to the morgue. He came with me for a certain purpose; he would not enter, as he had been forbidden the house, but in the evening he was in your grounds. I know he was there, for I saw him and spoke to him," cried the old gentleman, who was warming to his subject.

"Then I met you, Ingram, and you astonished me by telling me that Oliver was dead—drowned. For certain reasons, I did not contradict your belief. I went out again into the grounds to see him, but he was not to be found. I feared then that there had been foul play, for I knew that he would not have gone voluntarily until he had seen me. I was afterwards convinced that there had been foul play, for while Oliver was missing, his cloak and hat were in this very house! If he had gone voluntarily, would he have left his cloak and hat behind? I love my nephew! my love for him makes me indifferent to the feelings I have entertained for you. I can speak harshly, and I must! One or the other of you must answer me, or I will bring the matter into a court of law. My boy's apparel is in this house at this very moment, but where is he? Again I ask: where is he?"

A moment's deep and painful silence.

Could I so humiliate myself as to explain how the cloak and hat happened to be in my house? Could I give Ettie's falsity words? No. I felt that I could better—far better endure any suspicion, any disgrace to myself; not one word should pass my lips in detriment to her.

Uncle Waldon stood as stern and severe as any administrator of justice.

Leonard stood visibly agitated.

I stood propounding the above queries to myself.

"Gentlemen, this silence is strange. Speak—one or both of you, speak, and answer me; where is Oliver?"

A loud, sharp ring of the door-bell startled us all.

There was a short cessation of hostilities as we looked at one another, our glances seeming to say:

"A pleasant time, this, for a visitor."

A knock at the door

I answered it.

Peter handed me a telegram.

A wild hope thrilled my heart—could it be from Ettie?

With trembling, eager hands I tore open the envelope, and read the message.

My heart sank as hope died; it was not from Ettie, but from Beatrice.

It read:

"Have repented my rash step already, guardy. Please come for me at once at the Revere House."

"BEATRICE."

Of course I was glad that I had heard from my ward, but still I was bitterly disappointed that it was not word from the wife whom I had vowed to think of no more.

"It is from Beatrice," I said, mildly, quite forgetting the question that had been under discussion.

"Gentlemen, I shall have to be rude enough to leave you—"

"No!" cried Uncle Waldon, hotly. "Not one step do you stir till you have answered me."

"Sir!" I exclaimed, aghast. "Do you dictate to me in my own house?"

"I do. I am determined to learn the fate of my nephew; I firmly believe that I can gain that knowledge here. Neither one of you shall leave my sight till you give me some satisfaction."

"I have already answered you," I said, coldly.

"Where did you get this cloak and hat?—tell me that."

"I cannot."

"You cannot, or you will not?"

"I will not."

"That tells against you, Ingram."

"Very well, sir."

"And everything tells against you!"

"Very well, sir."

"This affectation of indifference is unbearable!" cried the old gentleman, growing very red in the face, and commencing to stamp angrily about the room. "Unbearable, I say! You were jealous of Oliver—who so likely to do him harm as you? Only tell me—only let me know the fate of my beloved nephew, and I will depart in peace. I can endure anything but this suspense—this uncertainty."

His voice broke at his last words, and I pitied him.

I said, gently:

"Believe, me, Waldon, I would tell you if I could; but I cannot. And really, I must go; my ward is waiting for me. You must excuse me, gentlemen."

I turned to the door, but ere I had reached it Uncle Waldon sprang to me, and forced me back, as he cried, wrathfully:

"Not one step, sir!—not one step, till you have answered me! You do know, and you must tell me where Oliver is! Speak!"

"I have nothing to say."

"I cannot believe you, Ingram. You must know something of him."

"I fear I cannot convince you, Waldon. You must think what you will—you must do what you will! I was fast losing my temper. 'Go—go, at once, and cry out, if you will, that I have murdered your rascally nephew!—or that I have spirited him away! Anything—anything—only stand out of my way now, so that I can go to my ward! I tell you, Waldon, I am getting angry!'"

"And I tell you, Ingram, I am angry!"

"Step out of my way."

"Not till you have answered me."

Just then I heard Leonard muttering something about a pressing engagement.

I looked up at him, and saw him going toward the door.

The telegram which I had received was lying on the floor near where he had been standing.

I had dropped it unknowingly.

I felt convinced that Leonard had read it, and that he was now going to look after his intended bride.

That would never do. I must see Beatrice first, and tell her how I had been deceived in the character of the man whom I had selected to be her husband.

"Hold!" I cried, springing by Uncle Waldon, and detaining Leonard. "You cannot leave this house till I am gone!"

He looked at me in surprise.

I was too much enraged to make explanations just then.

"You cannot see Beatrice till I have seen her," I added, as I forced him back into a chair.

I then started toward the door myself, saying:

"Pray make yourselves at home till I return, gentlemen. Necessity compels me to go like this. I bid you good-evening."

The words were scarcely out of my mouth, when Uncle Waldon sprang to me again, and forced me back, crying:

"Ward or no ward, you shall not leave my sight till you have told me something of Oliver."

"This is too much!" I exclaimed, exasperated beyond measure. "Have a care, Waldon, how you—Here! Back—back, I say!"

I broke off suddenly, as I saw that Leonard had seized this opportunity, and was again about to make his exit.

I forced myself from the old gentleman's hold, and sprang after him, crying:

"Back! I am master here. You cannot leave till I have gone, and I am going now. Again, gentlemen, good-evening."

This time I succeeded in reaching the door before Uncle Waldon could detain me.

I flung it wide open, quickly, passionately, and was about to stamp angrily forth, when, lifting my eyes, I saw standing on the threshold—my wife!

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE STORM AT ITS FIERCEST.

"ALLAN INGRAM!"

"Ettie, by all that's wonderful!"

These exclamations sounded out like two cannon-bursts. Then followed a deep silence, during which we faced each other, looking as if we had each met with a visitant from another sphere.

Could I believe my eyes? Was it really my wife, here, in this house, after I had been so well convinced that she was gone from me forever?

I looked her over sharply.

Yes, it was she, my Ettie, as lovely as ever, but, oh! so pale—so very pale, and so sad.

She was standing now with her hands clasped, and looking at me half-eagerly, half-anxiously, as if she were trying to determine whether she should remain or flee.

She had on the long cloak, the dark hat and heavy veil, which I had last seen when I accompanied her on that dark night's ride.

I was too astonished to greet her—too astonished to speak.

I stood there looking, and she the same, as if spell-bound.

Her voice, low, timid, tremulous, finally broke the spell.

"Allan, I thought—I believed that you were gone. I saw your name in the papers—"

That was why she had returned then.

She thought that I was well out of the way, and so she had come back to the luxury and plenty that she could not obtain elsewhere.

The fiend of jealousy took possession of me again; it cast out love and joy from my heart, and made a demon of me.

I interrupted her fiercely:

"Of course you thought that I was gone! It was my intention that you should think that I was gone. I was determined to know the truth, and at last, thank Heaven, I have learned it. You thought I was gone—of course you did! so did everybody. But I wasn't—and I am not now. I am here—right here, madame; and to your face I tell you, I know it all—"

"Allan—Allan!" she pleaded, whisperingly, "we are not alone. And surely, you do not know what you are saying. Wait—"

"Not one moment, madame. What I have to say—which, believe me, I do wittingly—I will say now. Yes, even if it were in the presence of hundreds. I tell you I know all, for I have followed you—tracked you! Gone? Ha—ha! Why, madame, who played the cavalier to you on that dark and rainy night? Who brought you to the house of James Nelson? Who, I say? Was it a stranger to whom you appealed for aid?"

"Why, Allan, what do you know of that?" she faltered, starting back, and looking at me in amazement.

"What do I know of that, madame? I will tell you, and I can do it in no better way than by showing you this," and triumphantly I extricated that pocket-book from my pocket, and flourished it almost under her nose.

"Mine!" she exclaimed, aghast.

"Of course it is yours," I cried, gleefully. "You dropped it in the carriage—do you remember?"

"No; but I missed it after—"

"After I left you. Yes, it was I to whom you appealed, madame! It was I who drove you through

the rain, and the darkness, to the house where your lover was lying!"

"Allan, you shall not insult me so!" she cried, indignantly. "My lover! It was to you—you, who have been, and are still so unjust and cruel—that I was going."

"Ettie," I said, severely, "this will not help you. I know all. I know that you left early on the following morning in company with—"

"On the following morning," she interrupted.

"No, sir! I left the house this afternoon—"

"Oh, Ettie," I said, commiseratingly, "how can you?"

"Do you not believe me, sir?"

"How can I, when I know to the contrary?"

"How did you learn?"

"By inquiry, madame."

"When?"

"On the very morning on which you left."

"Of whom did you inquire?"

"Of your hostess, madame—a very abrupt person, by-the-way."

"Oh, you are altogether wrong, Allan! My hostess—as you are pleased to call her—was a bed-ridden dame. You certainly could not have inquired of her."

"Bed-ridden! Ha—ha! Stout, strong, and saucy—is that your definition of bed-ridden?"

"I tell you, she was not stout, nor strong, nor saucy! I guess I know!"

"And I tell you, she was stout, and strong, and saucy! I guess I know!"

"You don't!"

"I do!"

"Oh, it is useless to try to convince you," she exclaimed, in despair.

"And it is more than useless for you to hug longer the idea that you can pacify me by your denials. I brought you myself to the house of James Nelson—"

"I beg your pardon, Allan, you did not," and a gleam of mirth leaped to her eyes.

"I did not?" I cried, in a frenzy. "Have I not shown you the proof that I did?"

"Still I say you did not bring me to the house of James Nelson."

"Ettie, are you mad?"

"No, I think not," and the gleam of mirth deepened.

"Then, what do you mean by saying—"

"I mean just this: you brought me to the house of Nelson James."

I looked at her for a moment blankly and then I groaned:

"And I sought for you at the house of James Nelson."

"Exactly; and you have been visiting another's sins upon me."

"I am truly sorry, Ettie," I said, penitently.

"I cannot believe you, Allan. You have been sorry so many times, but it never lasts. You have such unquestioning faith in your own stupidity—"

"But this seemed so clear, Ettie. I read the note that brought you to that lonely place—I accompanied you there—I went again to the same house, as I believed, and learned that you were gone."

"A little faith in me would have saved you all this, Allan. I could have endured anything that night—yes, I could have walked to that house, through the storm and the darkness, so anxious was I to get to you. I felt so sure that the note referred to you."

"And to whom did it refer?"

"To—to," she faltered, then she looked hastily around the room, her face pale again, her hands clasped together.

"Where is Beatrice?" she asked, at length. "Let me see her first."

Just that little hesitation on her part dispelled my penitence, and I was racked with jealousy again.

"Can you not answer my question, madame? To whom did that note refer?"

"Can you not answer my question, Allan? Where is Beatrice?"

"Answer me, madame!"

"Oh, Allan, answer me first! Where is Beatrice? Send for her; or let me go to her," and she turned to leave the room.

"Stay!" I cried. "You will not find her here."

She looked at me apprehensively.

"Not here! Where, then?"

"I cannot explain now. Let it suffice for you to know that she is not here."

Just then I thought of Leonard. I looked around—he was gone! He had succeeded in making his exit while I had been parleying with Ettie.

"The rascal!" I cried. "I must see Beatrice before he does! I must go at once."

"Where—where, Allan?" asked Ettie, catching me by the arm as I started to go from the room. "Where are you going?"

"First to the library to get my coat and hat; and then— But don't detain me, Ettie—there is need for great haste. I can't wait even to hear you."

"Only one moment," she pleaded, still clinging to my arm. "Or, let me get your coat and hat for you. I will go—let me go, Allan."

"No, I cannot wait. I tell you, I must hurry. Do not— Do you hear me? do not detain me!"

She clung to my arm more tightly still.

"Let me speak, Allan—let me explain. Oh, why did I come here!" she moaned. "I was so sure that you were gone. I did not think—"

"Ah—ha! What is this?" I cried, scenting more cause for jealousy. "You were so sure that I was gone that you—what—what—what is it, Ettie?"

"Oh, if you were only reasonable, Allan! or, if Beatrice were only here! But listen—oh, listen to me now! That note, it—it referred to—oh, Allan, remember that I thought it referred to you, but it was—it was—"

"Why do you hesitate?" I asked, savagely.
 "Because I know how unreasonable you are. But I must tell you—it was Oliver—"
 "Oliver!" came in a loud, eager voice from the further end of the room. "Did you say Oliver?"
 Ettie looked toward the speaker.
 "Mr. Gordon," she faltered. "Or was it Benton? Oh, Allan, it's that detective!" she whispered to me, most piteously.
 "It is neither," I said, pompously; "it is Waldon. You see before you, Ettie, Oliver's uncle from India, who has been holding me accountable for the strange disappearance of his nephew—who has, in fact, almost accused me of murder."
 "Oh, no—no!" cried Ettie; "Oliver lives—Oliver lives! He had been injured—badly—in some way—by some one," she faltered, looking timidly, fearfully toward me, "and brought to this house, in this lonely, out-of-the-way place—"
 "What place?" asked Uncle Waldon, hastily.
 "Pray, tell me, madame, that I may go to him at once."

"He is not there now, sir. I could not leave him there alone, Allan," she said, deprecatingly. "He was so very—very ill. Aunt Phoebe came the next morning, and she told me that you had gone abroad; so we remained with him, and took care of him; and to-day, when we left, he left, too; and—and—"
 "But where is he, now? I beg of you, madame, do not keep me in suspense. Pray, tell me, at once."
 "He—he is—oh, that Beatrice were here! How can I tell? Allan will not understand, and I cannot explain while she is away!"
 "Madame, I beg of you," interposed Uncle Waldon.

I started for the door. I was too fearful of the consequences of a meeting between Leonard and Beatrice just now to wait longer; she might renew her promise to marry him; he might induce her to have the knot tied at once. I could not wait even to hear my wife. I started for the door, saying:

"I must go at once. Perhaps you will now allow me from your sight, Waldon, since your nephew is found—your rascally nephew, who has been the bane of my life! If it had not been for him I would never have had to endure all this trouble, anxiety, and misery. I have never harmed him, not even by a word. He has kept well out of my way; let him see to it that he does so in the future. If we should meet now, all the wrath that has been gathering for the past months would be vented upon him, and it would make me desperate, and heedless of consequences. Through him I have lost everything, wife, home, happiness—yes, everything! He has been forbidden my house—let him take care that he never enters it, for the day when we stand face to face there will be trouble—serious trouble!"

"Oh, Allan!" cried Ettie, still detaining me, "wait—wait till you are calm! Stay here, and I will get your coat and hat. Oh, do not—do not go to the library now!"

"And why not, may I ask?"
 "I cannot tell you. Oh, heed me, Allan! Be reasonable—be just—be merciful! Oh—oh, if Beatrice were only here! How will this end—how will this end? No—no," she added, exerting all her strength to keep me back. "You cannot—you must not—you shall not go till you are calm!"

"This is very strange," I said, looking coldly at her. "Why do you tremble so? Why are you so pale and terrified? What have you in the library that you fear I shall see?"

"Oh, I wish I were dead!" she wailed. "Or that I had gone home with Aunt Phoebe. So much for trying to help others."

"Why do you not answer me, Ettie?"
 "And, madame, why will you not tell me where Oliver is?"

She looked at us both, despairingly, for a moment. Then the light of a sudden resolve leaped to her face, and she turned and darted from the room.

Before I could take a step, Uncle Waldon placed his hand upon my arm, and said:

"Old friend, can you forget my harsh words? You understand, I am sure; deep anxiety for the fate of my nephew made me blind to everything else—"

"I cannot wait to listen to apologies now," I interrupted, testily.

"But tell me this, Ingram: Surely you do not harbor malice toward Oliver?"

"Are you in your senses when you ask me that? 'Harbor malice!'—can I harbor anything else than malice towards a man who has destroyed my happiness, robbed me of my dearest treasure—"

"Oh, tush—tush! That's all nonsense."

"Well, I can't stop to argue about it now," and I wrenched myself from his hold, and hurried from the room.

At the library door Ettie met me, my coat and hat in her hands.

"Here, Allan," she said, anxiously.

I took them, put them on, and turned to go.

She sighed with relief.

I had taken but a step or two, when I bethought myself of my gloves.

"What now?" asked Ettie, anxiously.

"My gloves," I said. "They are on the table, I believe."

"Oh, you do not need them to-night, Allan."

"I suffer with you there, my love," and I tried to pass her.

"I will get them," she cried, holding me back.

"Wait just one moment."

She darted in, but I followed.

Her anxiety had aroused my jealousy to the fullest pitch.

The room was in darkness, save for the red light from the grate fire.

"On the table, Allan, did you say?" Ettie called out.

"Yes," I replied.

She started violently as my voice sounded close to her.

"You can not see," I said, mildly. "I will light the gas."

"Oh, no—no, there is no necessity for that. I can see."

"But I can not. Will you not allow me the privilege of lighting the gas in my own house?"

By that time I had lighted it. I looked around sharply, but could see nothing that accounted for Ettie's great anxiety.

I looked at her as she hunted for my gloves; she was pale and trembling still.

"I cannot find them," she moaned.

"Ah, I remember now," I said. "They are on the table in that recess yonder."

I nodded toward the bay window, and then I saw that the curtains were partially drawn.

Ettie darted forward, but I sprang after her, saying:

"I will find them myself, if you please."

She turned aside with a low moan, and buried her face in her hands.

I angrily, passionately, drew the heavy curtains back, and there, sitting, or rather reclining in my large arm-chair, his face deathly pale, his eyes large and hollow, was the man—or, as it seemed to me at my first glance, the ghost of the man I hated, Oliver Waldon!

CHAPTER XXV.

A BURST OF LIGHT.

MANY times had I received proof of my wife's falsity, but this—this was the most convincing proof of all.

I looked, for a moment, in disdain upon my rival, and then I turned to Ettie.

I felt as if I were becoming petrified, and I know that I looked as I felt—as stern, as immobile, as rigid as a statue of stone.

She raised her bowed head from her hands, and met my cold gaze most appealingly.

It had no effect upon me, save to harden my heart even more toward her.

Quietly, icily, I said:

"You will now have to throw up your cards, Ettie, and acknowledge that you have lost. You have played a desperate game, and you have struggled bravely to the end; but now, in the face of this," and I pointed toward Oliver, who had arisen from the chair, and was standing in the recess, erect and dignified, "in the face of this, I say, you can do nothing but acknowledge yourself vanquished."

She had thrown aside her cloak, and hat, and veil, and she stood with her long robe sweeping gracefully about her, the darkness bringing out her clear, pale face by contrast, like a cameo on a dark setting. Never had she seemed so lovely to me.

Her very attitude was a prayer; her body bent slightly forward, her hands clasped tightly together, the jewels on them sparkling not more than the tears that hung trembling on her long eyelashes; and over all the firelight played, seeming to envelop her in a glow of golden glory.

Never had she appeared so lovely to me, and yet I felt that I hated her.

Her attitude, her eyes, her face, pleaded more eloquently than words; but I turned coldly away, heeding it not.

Now I would go, and for all time. Jealousy was gone, for love was gone; hate was with me instead, and I knew that regret and longing could not torture me again.

I had said that when Oliver Waldon and I stood face to face there would be serious trouble; but now, when that had actually come about, hate made me calm, and I could look upon him and utter not a word.

I glanced coldly, scornfully on him, then on Ettie, and then I started for the door.

"Oh, Allan—Allan!" rang through the room in piteous tones. "Wait! Oh, I beg of you, in God's name, wait!"

"For what?" I asked, quietly, looking back upon her.

"For—for—oh, my God—my God, I cannot explain!" she wailed, as she raised her hands to her head.

"I have asked for no explanation," I said, coldly. "The situation explains itself—you have smuggled your lover into the house which he has been forbidden to enter. I can only leave you to enjoy the happiness that my presence dispels. Good-by," and I started on again.

"No—no, Allan, you cannot leave me like this," she cried. "It is cruel!—it is unjust! I will not let you go now," and she sprang to me and clung to my arm. "Send for Beatrice—wait till you have heard her. I will plead with her to speak, to save me from this injustice—this foul injustice! When you have heard her we will part; I will go home, and you shall never see me again—never! But you cannot, you shall not leave me like this!"

I put her gently, but firmly, from me.

"Your ravings are useless, Ettie. We part now, and forever."

"Oh, Allan, if you only knew. Oh, Oliver, can you not help me?—can you not say something to help me in my distress?"

I turned toward him fiercely.

"I will not listen to a word from him! If he is wise, he will remain silent. And you, madame, be a woman! Don't think that you can wipe out the wrong you have done me with your tears. It can never be wiped out!—never forgotten!" I was losing control of myself, and my voice rang out sharp and high.

"I go now, and my last words to you both are—I hate you!"

"Oh, take them back, Allan!" Ettie cried, wildly, as she sank on her knees at my feet. "See me here, pleading, praying to you! If you knew what I have suffered—what I am suffering now, you would pity me! Wait, till all can be explained. Will you not have a little faith in me? Oh, Allan—Allan," and she caught my hands in hers, "I am your wife—you cannot, oh, you cannot leave me like this!"

"I can, and I will!" I cried, and rudely I cast her from me—so rudely that she fell prostrate to the floor.

Then I strode from the room.

On the threshold I turned, and saw her bowed to the floor, her slender frame convulsed with sobs.

I glanced at Oliver again; he stepped forward as if to speak. I raised one hand warningly, as I thundered:

"Not a word to me, sir! If you value your life, don't open your lips to me!"

"Oh, Allan—Allan!" pleaded Ettie, looking up through her tears, and extending her hands appealingly.

"He will comfort you," I said, pointing to Oliver.

"And now, good-by forever."

Hating my wife as I believed I did, this parting gave me no pain.

I hurried from the house, putting from my mind the picture of agony and anguish that Ettie, bowed to the floor, had formed, and turning all my attention to thoughts of Beatrice.

Could I hope to reach her in time? Having gained this unexpected insight into Leonard's character, I now believed him to be capable of any villainy. It was my fear that he would go to Beatrice, and by his plausibilities persuade her to marry him at once. He had my consent, for I had had no chance to retract it.

I hastened down the walk to the street, and looked about for the carriage in which Beatrice and I were to have gone to the church. It was not there.

I whistled for Peter, and stamped fiercely about, muttering angrily at this new delay.

He came running down the walk.

"How is it," I demanded, "that the carriage has been put up?"

"It hasn't been, sir," he replied. "The gentleman took it."

"What gentleman?"

"Mr. Waldon—Mr. Leonard Waldon, sir. The carriage he came in drove off at once, and when he went he took yours."

"The rascal! He did that to gain time by detaining me. Idiot! why did you not stop him?"

"How did I know, sir? Besides, it was done in a twinkling, sir; and I couldn't of stopped him now."

"Well—well—well!" I exclaimed. "This is most unfortunate! But I can't stand upon ceremony now—I'll take this carriage, and return thanks to the owner afterwards."

"No, you don't," cried Uncle Waldon, close beside me. "I'll take it myself, if you please. I suppose I have the right to it, as it is mine."

"I suppose you have," I returned.

"My nephew, friend Ingram, is too ill to be removed just now—"

"Be kind enough to refrain from mentioning that person to me," I interrupted, frigidly.

"Certainly—certainly," and he entered his carriage and drove rapidly off.

"Quick, Peter," I cried, "as if your life depended upon it, go and see about bringing the buggy around. At once, and don't lose a moment!"

What I endured while waiting for the conveyance it is impossible to tell. I stamped, and muttered, and raved most fiercely.

At last, I, too, was started on the way. I drove along at a reckless rate, whirling by the houses and trees so swiftly that they were scarcely discernible. My heart was very heavy; Leonard had had such a good start of me that I despaired of reaching the hotel in time. I drove on, and on, and at last, thank God! I reached the city; then I had not far to go. I was at the Revere House in a very little while; and as soon as I had composed myself a little, I entered.

Inquiring of the clerk confirmed my worst fears; Miss Ghent was gone; she had left about half an hour previous to my coming, and she had left in company with a gentleman.

Gone—gone! Half an hour! They could be married half a dozen times in half an hour! How could I find her now? How could I think where to go to seek her?

It was with great effort that I repressed a groan. As Leonard's wife, what a lifetime of misery would be hers! and I had, in a great measure, forced her to it. What could I do? Nothing—absolutely nothing.

Slowly, almost unwittingly, I ascended to the parlors. There was a faint hope in my heart that Beatrice had not yet gone, and that I might find her there.

I scanned the long room eagerly. No, she was not there.

I turned away, sighing wearily; and then I heard:

"Why, Mr. Ingram, you here!"

It was Marian Stewart. I was thankful to meet any one just then, and I greeted her heartily:

"I saw your name in the paper," she began.

"Many have seen my name there," I interrupted.

"But so long as it was not in the police reports we can let the matter rest. Have you, Miss Stewart, have you seen my ward? She was here—"

"Oh, yes; I have seen her," and her face lit up, indicating that she had something to tell.

"To-day?"

"This very evening as I came—I am visiting some friends here—I saw her in the parlor talking with Leonard Waldon—"

"Ah!" It was more a groan, than an exclamation. "Talking, oh, so earnestly, Mr. Ingram. He seemed to be pleading, she arguing; he was flushed and eager, she calm and cold. I ran up-stairs to take off my bonnet, *et cetera*. I'm sure I wasn't gone more than half an hour—when I came down again Beatrice was not here. I inquired for her, and I learned that she had left with a gentleman—Leonard, of course. I'm just curious enough to want to know what it all means—a runaway match, eh?"

"That is all, Miss Stewart?"

"No; there yet remains this," and she took from her pocket a letter. "I picked it up in the hall as I came in. It is for Beatrice—see? And it must be a message from the dead, for the hand-writing is Oliver Waldon's."

I seized it eagerly. Yes, it was for Beatrice, and it was from Oliver Waldon. Unopened—then she had not received it; or, at least, she had not read it.

A wild hope leaped into my heart—Ettie had said that Beatrice could explain; perhaps this letter would give me an inkling of the truth.

I determined to read it. Bidding Miss Stewart a hasty good-night, and evidently disappointing her by my abrupt departure, I hurried down-stairs.

There I opened the letter, and read:

"BEATRICE, MY WIFE: I dare to call you that again, for our true and much-tried friend, Ettie, has told me that through my supposed death you have awakened to a knowledge of your love for me. I implore you, come to me at once; I am too ill to come to you. I long to see you, to hold your hand in mine, to hear from your lips the words for which I have so long hungered.

"And, too, Ettie is in keen distress; she has borne much for us—she has been faithful to her vow at the expense of her own happiness. So, for her sake, as well as mine, come at once, and let all be made clear.

"I send this by my uncle, whose identity I have just discovered. He will make all necessary explanation to you. Your husband, OLIVER."

"My God! what is this?" I exclaimed.

I read it over again, while tears welled to my eyes, a lump arose in my throat, and my heart throbbed so that I could almost hear it.

Then out into the night I rushed, and heart and voice united in the glad cry of:

"Oh, God, I thank Thee! Light has come at last."

CHAPTER XXVI.

SUNSHINE AT LAST.

ETTIE was true—she was not a sinner, but a martyr. Could she forgive me?

And Beatrice—she was Oliver's wife. I could now sanction that union with my heartiest blessing, since it proved my Ettie true. But, good God! did not Beatrice believe that her husband was dead, and might she not by this time be wedded to another?

Oh, if she only had seen this note before she had left with Leonard! All might then have been well; but now, even if Ettie should forgive me for my injustice to her, how unhappy I would be in thinking of my ward's terrible fate.

And I—oh, worst reflection of all—I had been a fool—a dolt—an idiot! I felt that I deserved only condemnation for my want of faith in the sweetest, truest woman that ever drew breath.

Well, there was nothing to do but to put my fate to the touch—to go to Ettie, and see what there was in store for me.

I could do nothing for Beatrice, poor girl.

I retraced my way to the Revere House, seated myself in the buggy, and started on the return home.

I alighted from the buggy when at last I reached the grounds of my estate, and then I fairly crept along toward the house.

I could not go boldly in; I would reconnoiter first, and try to gain some idea of what my fate would be—if adverse, then I would creep away again, and no one would know that I had returned.

Entering the grounds as stealthily as if I had been a thief, I stepped to the veranda, clambered up, and, seated on the railing, I peered in, to discover Ettie, standing in the glow of the fire-light, that played fitfully over her dark dress and filled the dimly-lighted room with grotesque shadows. She was alone.

Dared I enter? I was willing to acknowledge that I had been in the wrong—but would that avail me now? I sat on the railing and pondered. On which side should I descend? Should I go out to a life of loneliness, or in to possible bliss?

I came down from my high place and approached the window. I stood there for a while, feasting my eyes on my darling. Oh, how I loved her! My heart thrilled with rapture as I looked upon her! Oh, if she could only forgive and forget, how happy we would now be!

Should I tap on the window? No; that might startle her, and she would leave the room.

I tried to open it; it was not fastened. Softly I pushed it back and stepped in. She evidently was in a deep reverie, for she did not seem to hear me as I approached.

At last my hand was on her arm, and I had spoken. "Ettie, I have come back," I said, tremblingly.

"I see you have," she returned.

I caught her hands in mine, saying:

"Ettie, I know all."

"So you have told me before this evening."

"But this is not the same; I now mean, all—everything."

"What am I to understand by that? 'all—everything?' Is it another lover?"

"Oh, no—no, Ettie, not that—all that has happened, all this terrible mistake! I am here, my darling, to crave for pardon.

She set her teeth hard together ere she answered:

"You told me that you hated me. It was a bitter—bitter blow, but it has fallen; the worst is over, I believe I can endure it now."

I saw that her self-control was deserting her; her hands were fluttering nervously. I drew her to me, as I whispered:

"Ettie, my darling, I know all. I know that Beatrice is Oliver's wife, that you have been a martyr, and that I have been a fool! A note intended for Beatrice fell into my hands, and it told me all. Oh, Ettie—Ettie, forgive me, and all the rest of my life I will strive to compensate for the wrong I have done you! Only say you forgive me."

She broke from me, crying passionately:

"Oh, why did you come back? We had parted—why did you come back to renew the agony?"

"Ettie, what do you mean?" I faltered.

Again she set her teeth hard together ere she went on. "You know now that you have been a fool, but does that alter the terrible consequences of your jealousy? I love you, Allan; but even so I cannot forget that my brother is dead, and that Oliver barely escaped death!"

"What has that to do with me?"

She looked at me commiseratingly—a look that seemed to say: "Why will you affect innocence longer?" Then she spoke rapidly:

"Do you remember Harry Bostwick's ravings? They told me how Herbert came to his death. Oliver's hat and cloak were upon you after he had been struck down in the grounds without. Who was jealous of Oliver Waldon—who, but you?"

"That will do, Ettie," and I turned sadly away. "If you still doubt me we had better part. I now say as you have said: why did I come back to renew the agony of parting?"

"Oh, God, I cannot let you go!" she cried, vehemently; "and yet, it will be better so," she added.

"Go—go, Allan, quickly, so that I cannot call you back! Leave me before I have time to say another word."

The door opened suddenly just then, and in walked Aunt Phoebe, her large umbrella tucked under one arm, the other she was flourishing wildly about.

"Oh!" she began.

With her hand (in which was a letter) in mid-air, and her mouth wide open, she stopped short as she caught sight of me. A moment thus, then:

"My sakes! Have you been a-traveling by telegraph, I want to know?"

I commenced to explain, but she interrupted me, as she began to flourish her arm again.

"Here, Et, take it quick and read it. Instead of going hum, I've been a-calling on your neighbors—leastways, on one of them, where we went to that supper-party. Mrs. Bostwick gave me that. Her son left it, she said, for you. I believe I know what's in it, if I am only Aunt Phoebe, and look like one of them old women who keep their money stowed away in their stockings," and she blinked in a terrible way at me, and bobbed her head till every corkscrew curl seemed to be performing some kind of a quick-step.

Ettie seized the letter, opened it and began to read, while Aunt Phoebe and I watched her in silence. Her face grew paler and paler as she proceeded; when she had finished she seemed as if about to faint.

Alarmed, I sprang to her, and as I caught her in my arms, she nestled close to me with a low, glad cry.

"Read it, Allan," she whispered.

I held her in close embrace as I read Harry Bostwick's confession.

I will not give it in full, but simply say that it told that Leonard was the villain who had hired him to do murder; that it was Leonard who had struck his brother down in my grounds that night, and who had carried him off after I had divested him of his cloak and hat.

"Oh, Allan, can you forgive me?" Ettie whispered, as I finished its perusal.

"Can you forgive me?" I asked, as I looked down—down into the fathomless depths of her lovely eyes.

"You must answer me first. I have wronged you so by doubting you."

"But I have wronged you more, my darling. You must answer me first."

"I must!" she cried, gladly, as she kissed me again and again. "Then I will! I will begin now to obey you, a little, only a little, understand. Forgive you? Oh, Allan, my husband, God knows how gladly I forgive you, and how gladly I forget all the miserable past! And you?"

I could not speak. I pressed her to my heart with a low murmured: "God be praised!"

I believe we each shed a few tears, and then the reconciliation was complete.

"I hope that's beautiful enough."

We looked up as we heard these words, and we saw that Aunt Phoebe was contemplating us admiringly.

There was a suspicion of tears about her eyes, but she sought to hide it by blowing her nose most furiously, as she said:

"I've been a-taking of a cold in my head, and it makes my eyes kind of watery."

Then her voice changed to a husky whisper, as pointing to the letter in my hand, she asked:

"That Bostwick did it—eh?"

"Yes," said Ettie, sadly.

"I thought so. You see, I heard him and Leonard a-talking together that night of the supper-party. Poor—poor Herbert," she sobbed, and then to hide her tears she had recourse to her pocket-handkerchief again.

"Yes, poor Herbert," sighed Ettie. "It was Herbert you saw at the morgue, after all, Allan."

"But how about the name on his linen?" I asked.

"I will tell you. Herbert was wild—very wild, you

know. Years ago he ran away to sea. He returned just before our trouble commenced. I heard of his arrival from Oliver. They had become acquainted in some way. Oliver was reckless just about that time, and he and Herbert were 'hail fellows well met.' Well, they went to a gambling-hall one evening; they drank and they played, and soon they found themselves indebted for a large amount. Oliver took all the blame and responsibility upon himself, for he had led Herbert on. He did all in his power to make restitution. I tried to gain your help, but you would not even let me tell you of the trouble. I appealed to Beatrice, and she helped us. Herbert was Oliver's chum for a while, and I suppose he was obliged to borrow the linen that was found upon him. Poor fellow! He was wild and reckless, but I loved him dearly. If he had lived—but we will not talk of that," she added, smiling through her tears. "It is all done, and it must not mar our happiness."

There was only one drawback to my bliss, and that was Beatrice.

I thought of her, and a sigh, almost a groan, arose to my lips.

"What is it, dear?" Ettie asked.

"Beatrice," I moaned. "Poor—poor Beatrice! We are happy, darling, but she—don't smile, Ettie; if you knew, you would not smile."

"Then tell me, love, that I may weep."

"Well, you see, Leonard—"

"Before you tell me, Allan, come with me."

"No; let me tell you first."

"No—no, come with me first. I've something to show you; after that I'll be ready to weep. Come." She took me by the hand and led me from the library to the evening room.

"Prepare to be astonished," she said, gayly, as she knocked upon the door and then opened it.

No amount of preparation could have enabled me to stand the shock of this great surprise unmoved—before me I beheld Beatrice seated on a low stool at Oliver's feet—Oliver, who now looked so glad and happy as he held his wife's hands in his.

I could not speak; I could only look. In fact, that is what we all did; we looked from one to another, and though tears glistened in the eyes of all, with one accord we joined voices in a chorus of laughter that echoed and re-echoed through the room and hall.

"Please explain," I said, helplessly, as the last echo died away. "Marian Stewart said that you left with Leonard."

"No, I left with Uncle Waldon. He came while I was talking with Leonard—"

"And at sight of me, Leonard vanished, I can tell you," spoke up Uncle Waldon. "He'll probably be-think himself of an important engagement over the water. Well, he is no nephew of mine now, so let him hie whither he will."

"But this note," I said, producing the epistle. Marian Stewart had found.

"Well, I dropped it, I suppose. And you found it?"

"Thank God, it fell into my hands! It was for you, Beatrice, but I read it. Forgive me and I will give you my blessing."

I was so happy that I could have hugged Oliver; I temporized matters, however, and shook him heartily by the hand.

Then followed explanations, congratulations, and a merry time generally.

Out of the babel of voices, the confusion of tongues, rose Aunt Phoebe's shrill squeak:

"I hope you're all happy enough! I guess I'll be a-going; I've done my share, and I'm willing to go to that place—wasn't it Mount Pisgah, Allan, you was a-wishing-me at?"

She was having her little revenge now. She blinked at me again, and set her corkscrew curls to dancing; but in the face of that I went to her, and thanked her, and told her that I should be proud to have her for a shining light, and an ornament, in my house forever.

No more lonely days for me in my library. Ettie is ever with me now, her lovely eyes telling of her happiness when her lips are silent.

"Oh, my darling," she whispered to me, yesterday.

"I love you so."

"And I love you more, my own."

"Oh, no, that is impossible."

"It is not, my love. Man's love, you know is—"

"No, Allan, it is woman's love that is—"

"Now—now, Ettie, there you are disagreeing with me."

"I? Oh, no, Allan, it is not I—it is you."

"Now, my love, pause, and think. Who began?"

"Who? Why, you, of course," and she laughed gleefully. "Now, acknowledge it."

I am not so mindful of my dignity now, and I acknowledged it gladly.

We often disagree, but only in a playful way. One of Ettie's chief charms to me is the manner in which she says:

"Oh, no, Allan, it is not I—it is you."

Well, we are all happy; Beatrice and Oliver, Ettie and I; and Aunt Phoebe and Uncle Waldon look smilingly on.

And so, The Tempest in the Household is over, and I am as happy as a king in the love of my Ettie—my wife—my young wife.

THE END.

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